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Words into actions

Two schools discover they have a voice

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Among the cacophony of calls for change and community improvement, teens in the suburbs are learning they have a voice.

And students at Carl Sandburg Junior High in Rolling Meadows and Iroquois Community School in Des Plaines are putting their words into action.

Through a new federally funded program for middle school students called Our American Voice, Sandburg students are spreading the word about the benefits of recycling.

They set up a display at a recent school open house and explained to passers-by what they can do to send less garbage to landfills.

To prepare for the event, the students visited Waste Management's landfill and recycling center in Grayslake.

"We stood by the window and could see the sorting guys working on the line," said eighth-grader Colleen Wiley, 14, of Rolling Meadows.

Bottles and jars can be recycled with their caps on, she said, but they must be thoroughly rinsed — or they

get tossed. No food particles allowed.

"With pizza boxes, if there is grease on them they can't use them," Colleen added.

Erik Butler, 14, of Rolling Meadows created a Power-Point presentation for the display.

"I learned that half the stuff in the landfills could have been recycled," he said, "and that 30 percent of the garbage is paper."

Groups from the 12 Illinois schools chosen for the pilot program will gather Friday, May 15, in Libertyville to present their projects.

Among those invited are parents, school leaders, and local and state politicians.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for students," said Marla Horwitz, a social studies teacher who acquired a grant from the Lake Forest-based Barat Education Foundation. "It really empowers them."

Another group is at Iroquois, where students chose to focus on safety. Busy Touhy Avenue runs in front of the school, but no signs are in place to warn drivers of a school zone, said social studies teacher Manuel Bustos.

"The posted limit is 35 mph, but many cars don't go 35," Bustos said. "I would guess

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Manuel Bustos,
Iroquois social studies teacher



Sandburg eighth-graders Moriah Heck, left, and Eddie Salazar chat about their recycling project with a visitor.

some go 40."

While a crossing guard helps children going to and from school, some older students cross the road in other places.

Recognizing the safety hazard, the students took action, starting with a survey of parents to gauge the level of concern and to log any past incidents.

As part of their research, they also have arranged to use an electronic sign to display the speeds for drivers to see.

The seventh- and eighth-graders, who meet after school, will work with school and city officials to determine whether new signs can be posted.

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Coffeen Wiley, left, and Hannah Whidder work at the display.

what's good and what they'd like to change."

Horwitz involved only her ninth-period class for the project, but she hopes the

program can be expanded next year.

"The kids are actively engaged. I would do it in every class," she said.