

Contact: **Barb Milosch, (859) 244-2719**

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Harnessing the Power of the Sun

A student's goal to produce enough solar energy to power Sayre School's science labs turns into a reality.

Sayre junior Parker Stewart knew that he wanted to do something impactful for the community, but he wasn't quite sure what he could accomplish. Last spring, his Advanced Placement (AP) Environmental Science teacher, Debbie Wheeler, challenged her students to design an independent study on an environmental topic. Parker leaped at the chance. "I knew from our class that renewable energy was an important topic, and solar seemed like the easiest and most practical natural resource for me to think about," said Parker. As he began his research on solar, he found a Google app that allowed him to plug in an address and find out how much sunlight that property receives each day. "Sayre's Upper School building was the ideal location in terms of the amount of daily sunlight it receives," Parker reported.

Parker met with Ms. Wheeler and presented his idea of having a solar panel installed on the Upper School's flat roof. She recommended that he perform an energy audit of the science lab to see how much energy a typical lab uses per day.

After concluding his research, including contacting a local installer of solar panels, Synergy Home of Lexington, and getting them on board with the process, he decided to pitch Sayre's Head of School Stephen Manella with his proposal. "To be honest, I thought I would make my presentation to Mr. Manella and he would say 'Excellent job! However, we can't really fund a project like that right now.' So, I was thrilled when he said he loved the idea and wanted to support the project."

After Sayre supplied the initial seed money to provide infrastructure and the purchase of one panel, an interested family wanted to get involved as well. Sayre is installing 30 panels, which may generate enough energy to run all four of the science labs in the Upper School. When Parker heard that news, he was overjoyed. "It feels surreal to think that an idea I had stemming from my AP Environmental class would have this kind of impact." The installation is scheduled for late November.

Ms. Wheeler said, "Parker's enthusiasm for this project was unique. He put in a significant amount of time to research the suitability of the Sayre Upper School rooftop for solar panels and even did a cost/benefit analysis to calculate a rate of return. I've had other students talk about environmental initiatives on campus, but Parker had the persistence and tenacity to make it happen."

Sayre is committed to environmental education and is honored to be one of the first schools to install solar panels in Lexington. Sayre is proud of Parker's passion and investment to add a new perspective of shine to the campus.

Our Mission:

Sayre School provides an innovative and inclusive learning environment that empowers students to achieve academic excellence, embrace challenge, and cultivate integrity in order to lead purposeful lives in an ever-changing world.