As Amanda walked through the park, she noticed a big new trash can called a BigBelly. When she looked it up on the web, it turned out to cost $6,000! The BigBelly has a solar-powered compactor inside, so it maximizes the amount of trash contained while minimizing the number of times it needs to be emptied. The BigBelly is one of many “green technologies” now available. But does it make sense to invest so much money in them? City managers and mayors say that each BigBelly will pay for itself in three years, because they only need to be emptied once a week. Traditional trash cans get emptied once or twice a day, at a cost of about $2,000 a year each, and the trucks that travel around to empty them use gasoline and pollute the air. Nonetheless, buying a lot of BigBelly cans could punch a big hole in any city’s budget!

The BigBelly uses a renewable energy source, the sun. Many other renewable technologies are under development. Some people are putting solar panels on their roofs, and switching from electricity produced with coal or gas to solar-powered electricity. Solar-powered cars and planes are under development. Solar-powered light strips have been installed on some rural highways; once in place, the strips run for free and rarely require maintenance. Investors are developing solar panels that can replace the asphalt on highways; these panels use solar power to generate heat (so that ice and snow melt immediately), light (so that streetlamps are unnecessary), and extra electricity for nearby towns and cities.

Investment in these solar technologies is expensive. The Department of Transportation gave $100,000 to the solar pavement project, but several million more will be needed just to finish the development. Is it worth investing in such expensive technologies? Should we proceed to invest in technologies that may never be practical on a large scale? Shouldn’t we conserve public funds for more immediate needs, like improving schools and fixing potholes? What if we develop green technologies but lack the funds to proceed with using them? How high a price should we pay for green technology?
ARE GREEN
TECHNOLOGIES
WORTH THE
INVESTMENT?

USE THE FOCUS WORDS

**conserve** (verb) to protect from loss

*Sample Sentence:* Jose and Rachel carefully *conserved* their water as they hiked through the desert.

*Turn and Talk:* What are three things you can do to **conserve** water at home?

**renewable** (adjective) able to be replaced

*Sample Sentence:* Nations around the world are investing in **renewable** energy.

*Turn and Talk:* Describe what is meant when people talk about "**renewable** resources." What are some examples?

**invest** (verb) to put money or resources toward something, expecting a future benefit

*Sample Sentence:* Research institutions **invest** a lot of money into programs for recycling, water purification, and renewable energy.

*Turn and Talk:* What can young people do to **invest** in their futures?

**proceed** (verb) to move forward

*Sample Sentence:* Since the road was under construction, many signs alerted drivers to “**proceed** with caution.”

*Turn and Talk:* Has the school year **proceeded** according to your expectations? Explain.

**maximize** (verb) to increase to the greatest possible amount

*Sample Sentence:* Green technology can help conserve the natural environment and **maximize** resources.

*Turn and Talk:* How do you **maximize** the amount of sleep you get on school nights?
DO THE MATH

As Americans worry about conserving resources, more people are thinking about renewable energy. The Obama administration promised to proceed toward maximizing production of cleaner energy, and has invested in wind and other renewable energy sources. However, most of America’s energy still comes from non-renewable sources like oil and gas. The information below comes from the U.S. Energy Administration’s 2011 report.

### Renewable Energy Consumption by Major Source

- Coal 20%
- Natural Gas 26%
- Petroleum 36%
- Renewable Energy 9%
- Nuclear Electric Power 8%
- Solar 2%
- Geothermal 2%
- Biomass waste 5%
- Wind 13%
- Biofuels 21%
- Wood 22%
- Hydropower 35%

**Option 1:** Which of the following is true?

A. Americans get more of their energy from coal than from petroleum (oil).
B. Americans get more of their energy from coal than from all renewable sources combined.
C. Americans get more of their energy from natural gas than from petroleum.
D. Americans get more of their energy from hydropower than from nuclear electric power.

**Option 2:** Nine percent of the energy Americans consume comes from renewable energy sources. Of this, 13% comes from wind. What percent of America’s total energy consumption comes from wind?

### Discussion Question: Nations around the world are investing in renewable energy. In 2005, 8% of the energy produced by the European Union (EU) came from renewable sources. To maximize renewable energy production, the EU set a goal of producing 20% of its energy from renewable energy sources by 2020. As of 2015, this change is proceeding on schedule: The EU is on track to meet its goal. Should the U.S. set a similar goal? Why or why not?
Sekou is giving a report on renewable energy.

"Scientists say conserving energy is not enough. We need to switch to renewable sources of energy like wind, water, and sun. To maximize our efforts, people around the world must work together."

Sekou proceeds. "Two scientists named Mark Jacobson and Mark Delucchi have a plan to meet all the world’s energy needs with renewable energy by 2030. Their plan would require governments to invest a total of 100 trillion dollars."

“What about using renewable energy here at school?” asks Nadia.

“Good question!” says Sekou. “I wonder if there is a renewable energy source that would both decrease our school’s emissions and conserve money.”

Sekou did some more research on renewable energy to learn about cheap ways to decrease emissions from the school and created the following table to share with the class. She calculated how much each energy source would cost her school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy Source</th>
<th>Statistics by unit</th>
<th>Statistics for our school (using 20 megawatt hours per year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cost ($/MWh)</td>
<td>CO₂ Emission (tons / GWh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>100.1</td>
<td>1,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Gas</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solar</td>
<td>144.3</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: http://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.cfm?id=427&t=3

Which energy source is the least expensive? Are any of the energy sources both inexpensive and healthy for the environment?

Discuss what other information should be collected before proposing using any of these renewable sources in your district. What might school leaders want to know?
ARE GREEN TECHNOLOGIES WORTH THE INVESTMENT?

conserve | renewable | invest | proceed | maximize

DEBATE THE ISSUE
Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A

☐ We should invest heavily in green technologies.

OR

☐ We should proceed cautiously with green technologies.

OR

CREATE YOUR OWN

☐ __________________________

☐ __________________________

☐ __________________________

☐ __________________________

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

“Can you show me evidence in the text that...”

“I believe that...”

“You make a good point, but have you considered...”

“I agree with you, but...”
ARE GREEN TECHNOLOGIES WORTH THE INVESTMENT?

TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

conserve | renewable | invest | proceed | maximize

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