



CPower

Case Study: Bismarck Public School System

Bismarck Public Schools Earn Revenue While Supporting Grid Reliability

Public school systems face constant pressure to manage rising operational costs while maintaining safe, comfortable learning environments for students and staff. Energy costs, especially during periods of extreme heat or cold, are a significant part of that challenge.

For the Bismarck Public School System (BPS), participation in Montana-Dakota Utilities' Demand Response Resources program, facilitated by CPower, has created a way to offset those costs while supporting grid reliability for the broader community.

By flexing electricity use when demand on the grid is highest, BPS earns revenue that can be reinvested into school operations without disrupting classrooms or daily activities.



Turning Energy Flexibility into a Community Asset

BPS is a system of publicly funded K-12 schools in Bismarck, North Dakota. There are 18 elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. BPS also operates an alternative high school, a vocational center, and an early childhood program.

As of 2026, BPS has enrolled 15 facilities in the Demand Response Resources program, including high schools, middle schools, elementary schools, an administration building, and an educational center. When grid conditions tighten and electricity demand approaches peak levels,

CPower dispatches a signal on behalf of MDU for participating BPS facilities to temporarily reduce energy consumption.

Working with CPower, BPS established a predetermined curtailment plan that allows the district to respond quickly and predictably. Rather than shutting off power entirely, the plan focuses on targeted load reductions that lower overall demand while maintaining comfort and safety.

In return, the district receives capacity and energy payments based on the amount of load reduced and the duration of each

event—turning flexibility into a reliable source of revenue.

Minimal Disruption, Measurable Impact

Demand response participation has caused little to no operational disruption for BPS, according to school officials. Events typically occur during summer and winter periods when schedules and building usage naturally align with curtailment opportunities. Load reductions are executed in ways that are largely invisible to building occupants, allowing learning and operations to continue uninterrupted.



Since enrolling, BPS has managed curtailments manually—such as selectively turning off breakers—while using program earnings to fund operational improvements, including HVAC upgrades and building management systems that will enable greater automation in the future.

Investing in Efficiency and Long-Term Value

Revenue earned through the program is reinvested directly back into school facilities, helping fund projects that improve efficiency, reliability, and comfort over time. These investments not only enhance day-to-day operations but also position the district to expand its participation through automated controls and smarter energy management.

“How can you afford not to do this program?” said Darin Scherr, Business and Operations Manager for Bismarck Public Schools. “It does take some work, but how would you justify to your school board and taxpayers that you are not participating?”

A Scalable Model for Schools and Communities

With support from CPower, Bismarck Public Schools demonstrates how public institutions can play an active role in grid reliability while generating meaningful financial benefits. By treating energy flexibility as a strategic asset, the district is helping stabilize electricity costs for its community and creating new funding streams for its schools.

“The professionals at CPower work with you to develop a customized curtailment plan that ensures success and makes participation easy,” said Larry Oswald, Director of Business Development & Energy Services at Montana-Dakota Utilities.

For Bismarck Public Schools, demand response is no longer just an energy program, it’s a practical, proven way to support the grid, strengthen community resilience, and invest in the future of education.





CPower

cpowerenergy.com

1001 Fleet Street, Ste 400
Baltimore, MD 21202