



# Steps to Starting a Recycling Program in your School

**Congratulations** on taking the significant step of recycling in your school! You are helping to create a sustainable environment for students and staff. Setting up a recycling program involves a few small steps that will make a huge difference and helps students learn leadership skills while becoming environmental stewards at school and at home.

The School Recycling Assistance team from Waste Management is available to help you start your program. Below are some helpful tips to establish and maintain a successful recycling program in your school.



## 1 Step One: Create a Green Team

The first step is to create a Green Team or the group of people that will champion recycling and help educate the school about any changes. Having a group not only spreads the work around but helps ensure program continuity in case of staff turnover. Consider the following ideas.

- Invite the principal, the custodian, dedicated students, and an enthusiastic teacher or two as key members of the Green Team.
- Ask an existing student team (ASB, environmental club, etc.) to help educate fellow students and to monitor the new recycling program.

## 2 Step Two: Assess Your Existing System

The next step to starting or improving your recycling collection program is to review what you already have in place and identify opportunities to improve your recycling set up. This is the operations piece. Think through what needs to be in place from when a student is ready to recycle to how the materials will be collected from the school. Make a list of any tasks that still need to be completed and identify the appropriate person or group that will take responsibility for these tasks.

## 2 Step Two: continued...

### Take Stock of Your Bins

- ❑ Are recycling bins in every classroom?
- ❑ Does every garbage container have a matching recycling bin next to it? (Try to avoid “lone” garbage containers where trash and recycling end up mixed together.)
- ❑ Are recycling (and potentially compost) bins in the lunchroom?
- ❑ Is a recycling bin next to each garbage container in the hallways?
- ❑ Are all containers labeled appropriately “garbage” or “recycling”?
- ❑ Do signs on recycling bins clearly show what can and can't be recycled?

### Finalize a Collection Plan

- ❑ Who is currently collecting the recycling from the classrooms and lunchroom? (Custodian? Students? Other volunteers?)
- ❑ How is it being taken to the outdoor dumpsters?
- ❑ Do you have appropriately sized outdoor containers?
- ❑ Do you need additional bins or tools, (e.g. wheeling carts) to make the collection process as efficient as possible?



## 3 Step Three: Implement Your Plan

### Once Bins are in Place, Set a Kickoff Date

- ❑ Make sure the Green Team (staff, principal, custodian, etc.) support the recycling plan and that tasks are assigned with an adequate timeline for completion.
- ❑ Set a date for when the new program will be rolled out.

### Educate

- ❑ Share the new recycling program and kickoff date in school announcements and at staff meetings to get everyone on board.
- ❑ Make daily announcements about the new recycling program for one week. Share these announcements over the school's PA system, at assemblies, in the lunchroom, and/or in classrooms. (See sample announcements below.)
- ❑ Create “3D” posters with real samples of what goes in the garbage, recycling and compost (if that's an option) bins.
- ❑ Use technology to help promote your cause! Post recycling facts to social media, write an article for the school newsletter/blog or make a video to broadcast at school.
- ❑ Place posters above waste containers in the lunchroom. Make sure all containers are labeled as “garbage” or “recycling” and include a small sign with pictures of what materials go inside.
- ❑ Hang recycling signs all around the school so students and staff will see reminders of the new program everywhere, not only when they are at a bin.

## Implement Lunchroom Monitors

- Have students monitor the lunch room every day for the first few weeks of a brand new recycling program. Once the program is established, continue to have monitors a few times per month.

## 4 Step Four: Measure and Share Successes

- Check inside your new recycling and garbage containers regularly to see if there is any contamination or other issues.
- Note how full the recycling and garbage dumpsters are on pickup day (work with the custodian) and help determine if the dumpsters need to be reduced in size or pickup frequency.
- Track your school's recycling rate and promote any changes to students/staff.
- Make a monthly announcement to remind students/staff to keep recycling and thinking about other ways to reduce waste.
- Have different lunch periods compete against each other to see who can recycle the most. Get students excited to reduce and recycle.
- Have students give daily/weekly recycling announcements.
- Share successes with the entire school and celebrate!



## Need Some Additional Help?

*In addition to providing technical assistance, our recycling education experts are available to guide a club, team or class of students through various environmental projects catered to their particular interests and needs. Projects can range from waste sorts and recycling events to creating personalized PA announcements and waste free lunch campaigns. Each "Green Team" will receive prizes and recognition for their work. Please contact [recyclinghelp@triangleassociates.com](mailto:recyclinghelp@triangleassociates.com) or 206-583-0655 to sign up or for more information.*

# CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

## Try These Ideas for Integrating Waste Reduction and Recycling Lessons into the Classroom

### MATH

- Have students weigh garbage before and after recycling is implemented to see how numbers change. Repeat monthly and graph results.
- Calculate and track the school's recycling rate.
- Create a graph for the lunchroom to track improvements.

### LANGUAGE ARTS

- Write a blog post about the environment or an essay about why recycling is important.
- Write a letter to groups that use your school to remind them to recycle when they use the school facilities.
- Write Twitter posts to remind students, families and staff to recycle during all school or sporting events.

### SOCIAL STUDIES

- Do a project on what we can learn about our society according to our garbage.
- Compare global ecological footprints.
- Have a "no garbage" day where the students try to not create any garbage during the full day.

### SCIENCE

- Study how recycling impacts climate change.
- Research how recycling helps cut down on harvesting new resources from the earth.
- Study how recyclable items are turned into new products.

### MUSIC

- Create a recycling-related song and post it on your school's social media sites.

### PUBLIC SPEAKING

- Have students give daily/weekly recycling announcements.

### Helpful Online Resources

- Waste Management (Think Green): <http://wmnorthwest.com/educational>
- Snohomish County Solid Waste: <http://snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3768>
- Washington State Department of Ecology (resources for educators and students): <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/services/ee/index.html>
- US Environmental Protection Agency (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle page): <http://www.epa.gov/recycle/>
- US Environmental Protection Agency (Waste Reduction Guide): <http://www3.epa.gov/epawaste/education/teens/pdf/school.pdf>

# Sample PA Announcements — about RECYCLING

## Monday

“ [School name] recycles! Did you know that about one third of the garbage we create in Snohomish County could have been recycled instead? Our school is launching a brand new recycling program, and you can help reduce our “garbage footprint” by recycling! Look for new labels on your classroom recycling containers. These labels show what can and cannot be recycled. Also look for new recycling containers in the cafeteria for collecting bottles, cans and milk cartons. Thank you for recycling!

## Tuesday

“ Recycling fact of the day! If a recycling bin contains too much food, garbage and other contaminants, the contents of that recycling bin will just get thrown away! Do your part to help [School name] recycle right, and be sure to keep food and liquids out of the recycling bins. Thanks for helping to reduce our garbage footprint!

## Wednesday

“ Hello [School name] Recyclers! What do empty water bottles, clean paper coffee cups, milk cartons and brown paper lunch bags have in common? Yep! They can all be recycled! Be sure that they are liquid and mocha goo free! And, remember to recycle your food and liquid free paper items!

## Thursday

“ Recycling fact of the day! Americans send over ten billion plastic bottles per year to the nation’s landfills. Every ton of plastic we recycle helps to save 685 gallons of oil. Be green and recycle your empty plastic bottles today!

## Friday

“ Recycling question of the day! What do bottle caps, candy wrappers, tissues, and Ziploc bags have in common? They are all NOT recyclable. Tissues, napkins and paper towels - and any paper with food on it - cannot be placed in the recycling containers. Help keep our recycling containers free of contaminants by placing your candy wrappers and Ziploc bags in the garbage. Thanks for recycling!

# Sample PA Announcements – RECYCLING and COMPOSTING

## Monday

“ [School name] recycles! Did you know that about 50% of the garbage we create in Snohomish County could have been composted or recycled instead? Today our school is launching a brand new recycling program, and you can help reduce our “garbage footprint” by participating. Look for new labels on your classroom recycling containers listing what can and cannot be recycled. Also look for new recycling containers and compost containers in the lunchroom. Check out the signs on the bins to help you properly sort your waste. Thank you for helping [School name] be green!

## Tuesday

“ Hey [school name] recyclers! Did you know that if a recycling bin contains too much food, garbage and other contaminants, the contents of that recycling bin will just get thrown away? Do your part to help [school name] recycle right, and be sure to keep food and liquids out of the recycling bins. Food and food-soiled paper can go in the compost bins! Thank you for helping [school name] shrink our “garbage footprint.”

## Wednesday

“ Composting tip of the day! While your leftover food items can't be put in a recycling bin, they can be “recycled” by placing them in the compost bin in the lunchroom. Our compostable materials are sent to Cedar Grove composting, where they are broken down and turned into fertilizer that can be used to grow new plants. Help save natural resources by composting those leftovers, and better yet, try to reduce the amount of edible food we are wasting in the first place!

## Thursday

“ Recycling fact of the day! Did you know that all of the garbage you produce is sent to a landfill, and that landfills generate a greenhouse gas called methane? The more garbage we create, the more heat-trapping greenhouse gases are generated by landfills. Do your part to help our planet stay cool by using the compost and recycling bins in the lunchroom. Thank you for reducing our greenhouse gas footprint.

## Friday

“ Composting tip of the day: Food is the most commonly thrown out item in Snohomish County. Not only does this waste money and natural resources, but it also leads to a lot of garbage ending up in the landfill. Help reduce food waste by only bringing or taking the food that you will eat. If you have leftovers, save them for later or place them in our new lunchroom compost bins! Be sure to keep plastic bags, produce stickers, and wrappers out of the compost bin. Be green and only bring or take what you'll eat!