



Working to Build Zero Waste Communities

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Five Boulder County Schools Among the First in the Nation to Move Toward Zero Waste by Joining Eco-Cycle's Green Star Schools Program**

Boulder, CO (Jan. 24)— Visit the cafeteria of an Eco-Cycle Green Star School on any given day, and you will witness a scene rare to any other school in the U.S. Rather than the Styrofoam containers and single-use service ware used by most schools, students ordering from the cafeteria menu at a Green Star School are served food with sturdy reusable utensils, cups, bowls and trays. Children bringing lunch from home wipe crumbs from their mouths with reusable cloth napkins rather than paper disposables and transport their lunches in reusable storage containers rather than non-recyclable single-serving cups or plastic baggies. At the end of the lunch period, kids get in line at a special station where they deposit service ware into hot, soapy water to be washed and reused, milk and juice containers into a "recyclables" bin, and apple cores and sandwich crusts into a "compost" bin.

This is one of many unique experiences five more Boulder County schools have just signed on for by participating in Eco-Cycle's Green Star Schools Program. **Columbine Elementary, Eisenhower Elementary, Heatherwood Elementary, Lyons Elementary and Niwot Elementary** will be joining nine existing Boulder County Green Star Schools in moving toward Zero Waste through increased recycling, composting and waste reduction activities. Over the past two years, students and staff at Bear Creek Elementary, Boulder Community School of Integrated Studies, Creekside Elementary, Douglass Elementary, Foothill Elementary, High Peaks Elementary, Horizons K-8, Mesa Elementary and Nederland Elementary have already made Zero Waste part of their daily school routine.

"A crucial step in making Green Star Schools a success is reducing the amount of packaging that students are bringing to school and throwing away," said Cyndra Dietz, Eco-Cycle's School Recycling and Environmental Education Program Coordinator. "We hope to accomplish this by providing parents and kids with some easy tips for packing a lunch that is waste-free."

It's not just the minimal lunchtime waste that's impressive at these schools – it's the commitment students, teachers, kitchen and custodial staff, and administrators have made to reduce waste at their schools all day long. Throughout the halls and classrooms you'll see things done differently. Recycling and composting bins—not trash cans—are ubiquitous. Even in the washrooms, students are reminded they are part of a very special program: compost collection containers have replaced trash cans for used paper towels and tissues.

"Approximately 25% of what's in the landfill could be composted," said Dietz. "Adding compost collection to the schools' recycling programs greatly reduces the amount of garbage produced, and that, in turn, not only saves resources but also reduces the school district's trash bill."

The first step in implementing this program in the five new schools will be identifying what is in the schools' garbage through trash audits. With the help of Eco-Cycle employees, one class at each school will spend an afternoon digging through the school's garbage to see what could have been recycled or composted, and what waste could have been avoided by choosing a recyclable,

compostable or reusable product. After classes report the results of the trash audit to the rest of their school, assemblies take place where the entire student body and staff receives training in the new collection system and their additional bins (see below for trash audit and kick-off schedules).

### **Eco-Cycle Schools Program Honored with Rotary Club's Our World Award**

Now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year, the entire Boulder/Broomfield County School Recycling and Environmental Education Program, including the 14 Green Star Schools, was honored with the Boulder Rotary Club's Our World award on January 19<sup>th</sup>. Each year, the award is presented to an individual or organization from the Boulder community making a significant contribution to the conservation and preservation of the environment. Eco-Cycle received a trophy and \$1,000 cash prize for its efforts in bringing environmental education programs, innovative services and workshops to local schools.

For 20 years, Eco-Cycle has remained committed to integrating environmental education with established school curriculum, ensuring that students in Boulder and Broomfield Counties learn about their environment and what their generation can do to care for it. During the 2005/2006 school year, Eco-Cycle instructors gave 1,264 presentations to more than 33,000 kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students on a wide variety of environmental topics such as recycling, air quality, household hazardous waste, forest ecology, energy conservation, waste reduction and composting. Recyclables are also collected from all 53,000 students and staff in the 80 Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley public schools, which amounted to 650 tons of recyclables last school year.

To keep pushing the boundaries of environmental education, Eco-Cycle also brings innovative special projects to schools. We've teamed up with International Walk to School Day, which encourages students to walk to school, to collect athletic shoes to be recycled or donated for reuse. The Waste-Free Lunch Contest is an annual competition where students contend with other schools to make the least lunchtime trash; students and parents are encouraged to rethink their buying habits so they avoid single-serving containers and foods that come with excessive packaging. The Locker Leftovers Project transforms the last day of school from a day when students chaotically fill the hallways with trash as they empty their lockers into a day when students fill bins with valuable recyclables and donations of unused school supplies for charity.

Eco-Cycle is a non-profit organization founded in 1976. Eco-Cycle made Boulder one of the first communities in the nation to implement curbside recycling. Now, Eco-Cycle has broadened its efforts—both locally and internationally—to pioneer the next revolution in resource conservation: Zero Waste. Eco-Cycle is partnering with businesses, government, schools, local community groups and individuals to create a Zero Waste community and to provide a Zero Waste model for the rest of the world. To learn more about Eco-Cycle, visit [www.ecocycle.org](http://www.ecocycle.org) or call 303-444-6634.

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