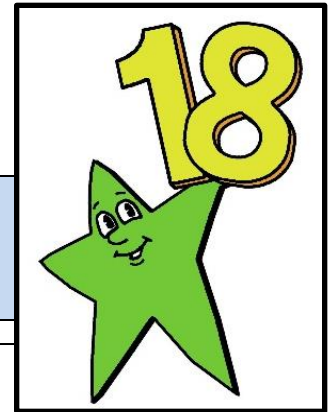


# Schoolwide Recycling Collection

eco-cycle

## Snapshot

Starting a schoolwide recycling program is an important, effective first step toward Zero Waste.



<https://bit.ly/eco-cycle-zero-waste-schools-guide>

**Objective:** Students will be able to distinguish between items that can be recycled in the school's recycling bins and ones that belong in the trash. They will also be able to state one or more ways that recycling helps the earth.

**Age Group:** K-12<sup>th</sup> grade

**Setting:** School building

**Project Duration:** Ongoing

## Materials:

- Examples of recyclable items found at school (classroom/office paper, cardboard, drink containers)
- Collection bins for recyclables (5 to 8-gallon for classrooms, larger for most other areas)
- Signage/labels for bins
- Poster-making materials

## Why This Project Matters:

Much of the solid waste produced by people in North America has the potential to be recycled. Different communities offer different recycling opportunities to their citizens, and schools are an important part of these efforts. The benefits of recycling include preservation of natural habitats, reduced air and water pollution, fewer waste items filling up landfills, reduced fossil fuel usage, and increases in available jobs (compared with manufacturing items from virgin materials and landfilling).

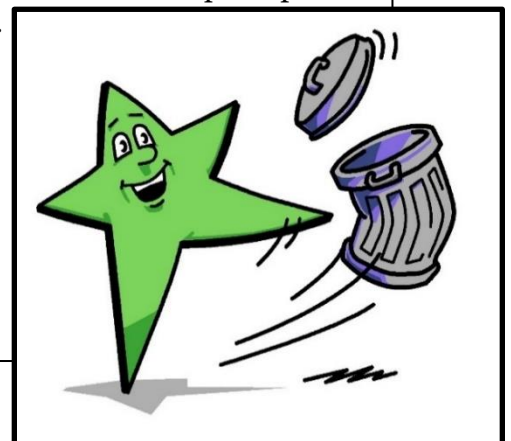
## Project Summary:

A successful school recycling program features the efficient collection of recyclable items, regular education of the school community, and the tracking of volumes of recyclables collected. To achieve this success, the school will choose a reliable recycling hauler, acquire recycling bins for distribution throughout the building, provide regular training for students and staff, and communicate the diversion rates to the school community to motivate and encourage participation.

## Implementation:

### Getting started:

- A teacher, administrator, parent, and/or student group must take responsibility for implementing and maintaining the program. Start by meeting with the school principal to determine the program budget. The main costs are for bins and collection service. When discussing options, consider that the school will be able to reduce its trash hauling service and that those cost savings can be put toward recycling collection fees.



- Find a hauling company to service the school’s recycling. Inquire with local trash service providers, the municipal waste department, independent recycling services, etc. Compare bids from several companies and choose one that has a proven track record for reliability. Ask the company about the types of bins they will provide outside of the school for collection (dumpster, carts, etc.), making sure the school has space for these containers. Also ask which materials they accept in their recycling program, and which must be excluded. Finally, ask if they provide volume reporting on the materials collected and request a monthly report to be given to your school.
- Obtain the company’s recycling guidelines. This document should detail which items are acceptable for recycling and which are not. Use these guidelines to determine the types of bins you’ll need to purchase for use inside the school unless the recycling company provides those as well. In some communities, all recyclables can be placed together in the same container (called “single-stream” recycling), while in other areas paper and cardboard items need to be collected separately from metal, glass, and plastic containers.
- Determine locations within the building where recycling bins would be effective. Main hallways, staff lounges, and the cafeteria are common places. Most schools also include recycling bins in their classrooms and offices.
- Decide how often and by whom these bins will be serviced. Classroom bins are often the responsibility of the teacher and students, while cafeteria and hallway containers are usually a custodial duty. (Teachers and students empty their classroom containers into the larger hall or cafeteria bins, which custodians then service.)
- Signage on and near the bins is crucial. Design adhesive labels with the recycling guidelines (including images if possible) and place them on the lids and sides of each container. Posters displayed above or near the bins are also quite valuable.
- Purchase the recycling bins needed to properly outfit your school. Five to 8-gallon containers are ideal for classrooms; 32-gallon containers are best for hallways and the cafeteria. Bins should be consistently color-coded for easy recognition. Inquire with local businesses about any used or surplus containers that they might be willing to donate.

### Extensions:

- Hold a “Recycle Right” contest. With the help of a student group, monitor the recycling bins of individual classrooms or grade-levels. The class or grade with the least contamination wins a prize.
- Conduct an audit of the trash to see what materials are still going to the landfill. With a student group, discuss ways to divert some of this waste by encouraging reducing or reusing. Implement a campaign to spread these waste-reduction ideas. (For example, if several plastic baggies are found in the lunch trash, the campaign could focus on how to pack a lunch using reusable containers.) (See Conducting a Waste Audit, Chapter 30.)



*Training and implementation:*

- Gather samples representing what can be recycled in the school's new program and use them while training a student sponsor group. Have students create posters to be displayed by the new classroom, hallway, and cafeteria recycling bins. Posters featuring 3-D, tangible examples are very effective.
- Meet with the custodians to review the recycling collection schedule (from the hauler) and how the in-school component of the collection will work. To have a successful program, it is essential that the custodians are supportive and that they also feel supported by the rest of the school community.
- Facilitate a 30-minute training with all school staff before the recycling program is launched.
- Prepare a statement for the school's newsletter announcing the implementation of the program to families.
- Prepare and provide a 30-45-minute kick-off assembly to the school community that outlines why the school is choosing to implement this program, what it will look like, and how they can participate. If possible, give the student group a significant role in the presentation. Incorporate eco-facts about landfills, trash, pollution, and natural resource usage. Show examples of recyclable items and non-recyclable items. Indicate locations of the new receptacles on a school map and have example bins on hand. If recycling bins will be placed in the classrooms, have them available for teachers to pick up on their way back to their rooms.
- Have teachers sign their class up for "mini-refresher presentations" to be given one week after the kick-off assembly. These brief, 20-25-minute in-class sessions provide the important opportunity for students and staff to ask more detailed questions.
- If possible, train parent volunteers to assist students with the proper sorting of recyclables in the cafeteria for the first three weeks of the new recycling system. A student group can also help with this.
- Create inspiring announcements to be read during the first few weeks of the program. A student group may assist with the writing and reading of the announcements. Include reminders about recyclable and non-recyclable items, as well as interesting eco-facts.



*Maintaining the program:*

- Have student or parent volunteers monitor recycling bins in different areas of the school twice per week for six weeks following the kick-off. If repeat issues arise (e.g., paper napkins ending up in the recycling bin instead of the trash or compost), make announcements and include reminders in the school newsletter.
- For the first year of the program, distribute recycling guidelines to teachers and staff each semester. Afterwards, distribute guidelines at the beginning of each school year and by request.
- Provide the school with the landfill diversion rates received in the hauler's volume reports. This can be shared with the school community as a centralized graph (see tree banner on right), announcements, or in the school's newsletter.
- Have a student group conduct an annual audit of the recycling and trash bins (see Conducting a Waste Audit, Chapter 30) to identify what the school is doing well and what might need improvement. Publicize the results.
- Refresher assemblies and/or in-class presentations every school year, especially for the incoming class of students, is extremely beneficial for maintaining knowledge about and enthusiasm for the program.



**Assessment:**

Track and report the volumes recycled over time. To determine student involvement, quiz or survey students in the classroom or at the cafeteria waste stations. Ask questions, such as:

- Name one item that can be recycled at school.
- How does recycling help the environment?
- What do you recycle in your classroom?
- Can a milk carton be recycled?
- What natural resource are you saving when you recycle a can?

**Related Activities:**

- Schoolwide Compost Collection – Chapter 25
- Reinforcing Collection Programs Over Time – Chapter 27
- Reporting Progress – Chapter 28
- Conducting a Waste Audit – Chapter 30
- Special Considerations for High Schools – Chapter 35



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