

A Guide to Recycling at School

For today's young people, recycling is an integral part of everyday life. While many children regularly collect and separate recyclables at home, they may not be aware that many of the paper products they use every day - books, notebook paper, puzzles, and game boxes - contain recycled fiber.

In 2005 Americans recovered 51.5 percent of the paper consumed in the U.S. Used paper goes back into making new products such as newspapers, corrugated containers, grocery sacks, cereal boxes, and office paper. To build on this success, the U.S. paper industry has set a goal to increase paper recovery to 55 percent by 2012.

In order to reach this goal, we need your help. High quality products like white computer paper, copier paper, and notebook paper used for homework represent a tremendous growth opportunity for school recycling programs.

Learning the Basics

Use these guidelines to improve your current school recycling efforts or to develop a new program. School recycling should be similar to your community's curbside or drop-off program to better prepare students and their families to recycle at home.

1. Gather the Facts

Identify recyclables

Conduct an audit to determine the amount and types of recyclables in classrooms, staff offices, food service areas, and libraries. This assessment will also provide information about where most of the recyclables are generated.

Determine the best way to separate and collect recyclables for clean and easy recycling. Start with what is most abundant in the recycling stream, which will likely be various types of paper.

Determine what to collect

Talk to the school's recycling company or the community recycler for information about which materials are accepted for recycling. The recycler may require a certain measurement (either weight or volume) of recyclable materials in order to establish a contract.

Below are examples of questions that should be asked of the school's recycling company or community recycler.

- What are the potential costs and benefits of recycling?
- Will a decrease in the amount of materials going to disposal help cover the costs of recycling?
- How will the program be handled during the summer months or holiday breaks?
- What grades of paper are accepted and what is the minimum amount required for pick up?
- How will materials need to be collected?
- What are the common contaminants for each material?

- Will the school receive updates on the quality and quantity of materials collected?
- Will additional containers or other equipment be required for pick up of recyclables?

2. Design a Program

Generate school administration support

As you begin to design a program, it is important to enlist the support of school administrators and custodial staff.

Use the data gathered during the audit, discussions with recycling collectors, and input from any local paper companies to determine the potential value of a school recycling program. Also consider benefits to students, the school, the environment, and the community. Use this information to formulate a program and build ownership among key school officials, faculty, and staff.

Designate a program coordinator

To help get things started, appoint a recycling coordinator and a supporting team. The coordinator and his/her team will be essential to the success of the program by providing organization, education, and enthusiasm for the recycling efforts.

Organize collection procedures

Work with administrative and custodial staff to create a collection system that encourages student participation and ensures that recyclable materials are kept clean. Things to consider:

- **Containers** - Determine the size, number, and location of containers needed to collect the identified recyclables in classrooms, offices, and libraries.
- **Collection points** - Determine how and where recyclables will be collected and stored between pick ups. Check any fire codes that may affect storing paper in school buildings.
- **Training custodial staff** - Work with custodial staff to organize a manageable collection system. Provide proper equipment and train custodial staff in new procedures.
- **Signage** - Encourage students to create signs for the recycling collection containers to heighten program visibility and show what materials are being recycled in each bin.

3. Start it Up

Phase-in

For smaller schools, it may be possible to start the recycling program all at once. For larger schools, begin with a short pilot or test program in a cluster of classrooms or offices. This will help the program coordinator and team monitor student and staff response to the program, assess the amount of recyclables collected, and address specific contamination issues.

Hold a kick-off event

When you're ready to begin the program, start with a kick-off event that includes students, faculty, custodial staff, parents, and community recycling leaders. This is an opportunity to build awareness, encourage program ownership, and educate your audience about what and how to recycle.

Involve students

Student participation will help generate enthusiasm for the program. Encourage students to monitor specific bins and assist with the collection of recyclables.

4. Education is Essential

Education is the most important part of any program. Educate students, faculty, and custodial staff about the benefits of recycling and the specifics of the program.

- **Make presentations** - Invite the recycling company to participate in a school assembly. Visit individual classrooms to demonstrate recycling procedures.
- **Share information** - Use the school newspaper, website, email, and student orientation to reinforce the importance of recycling at school.
- **Use peer education** - Have older students teach younger classes about the school recycling program.
- **Arrange field trips** - Help teachers arrange student field trips to local recycling processing or paper mills, so they can see how the materials they recycle become new again in everyday products.
- **Focus on teachers** - Teacher acceptance and understanding of the program will help educate students. Use staff meetings, written communications, and in-service days to educate teachers about the program.
- **Engage students** - Organize a poster or slogan contest for the recycling program. Allow students to decorate a school hallway or bulletin board with recycling education information.
- **Monitor recycling bins** - Inspect bins regularly and create a system to remind students and faculty about appropriate recyclable materials.
- **Reinforce** - Take every opportunity to communicate the progress and success of the recycling program and praise positive actions.

5. Measure and Track Results

Keep track

Track results to evaluate program value. Work with the recycling company to gather information, usually monthly, on the amount of material that is recovered for recycling.

- **Quantity recycled** - This amount is typically reported in tons, although measuring in pounds may be more realistic (and dramatic) at smaller schools. Compare waste collection before and after implementing the recycling program to get data on the amount of material being diverted from disposal. Totals by classrooms, staff offices, or other generation points may be useful.
- **Expenses and cost-savings** - Start-up costs such as new bins, teacher and student education, and awareness activities may be offset or covered by a decrease in material going to disposal.
- **Program acceptance and participation** - Monitor progress during the implementation of the program. Survey faculty, students, custodial staff, and your recycler to get feedback on program results.

- **Publicize recycling successes** - Positive feedback motivates participants to keep recycling.
- **Students and teachers** - Keep a running total and post monthly recycling figures to make students and faculty aware of the results of their efforts. Recognize recycling champions at school gatherings, faculty meetings, and in the school newspaper or website.
- **The community** - Provide regular updates to parents and community residents about program activities and successes through newspaper articles, community and school events, school newsletters, community emails, and presentations to parent organizations.
- **Nationally** - Enter your school recycling program in national recycling awards and competitions to bring recognition to the program's best practices and results, and to student leaders.

6. Keep It Up

Sustaining a school recycling program takes ongoing effort. Each time a new school year starts or students return from a long summer or holiday break, education needs to be reinforced. Use these tips to keep your recycling program on track:

- **Solve the "summer months" problem** - Determine up front with the recycler how to handle the fluctuation in recyclables during school holidays and breaks.
- **Make it fun** - Motivate students with contests, classroom rewards, and personal recognition for achieving recycling goals.
- **Create a slogan** - Create a short, simple, and engaging slogan for your recycling effort and use it consistently. Build flexibility into the program - track results and be willing to make changes as the program grows or circumstances change.
- **Ask for feedback** - Survey students, faculty, and custodial staff about the program. What's working? What isn't? What would help to improve participation?
- **Include everyone** - Ensure that the program is not dependent on one champion to succeed. A recycling program needs the participation and ownership of the entire school.

Other online resources to consider as you begin your recycling program:

www.afandpa.org
www.kab.org
www.nrc-recycle.org
www.plt.org