RECYCLING: IT STARTS WITH YOU!
A Guide to Recycling at School

Tips and perspectives from the American Forest & Paper Association
Giving used products new life.

For young people today, recycling is part of every day life. In 2011, Americans recovered for recycling more than 66 percent of the paper consumed in the U.S. That old paper went into making new products including writing paper, newspapers, corrugated containers, grocery bags, cereal boxes and copy paper. Recovered paper is a valuable commodity, and schools contain large quantities of high quality paper that can be turned into new products. Educating students and their families about their role in the paper recycling process is good for the environment and good for our nation’s future.

Use this guide to help establish or improve upon your school’s paper recovery program.

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.

Determine what to collect for recycling. 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 before they will set up a contract. You will also need to understand how recycling specific materials might impact the school’s current disposal contract, services and costs.

Before you get started, ask your recycler the following questions:

1. What grades of paper and paper-based packaging are accepted and what is the minimum amount required for pick up?
2. How will materials need to be collected?
3. What feedback will program administrators receive on the quality and quantity of materials collected?
4. Will additional containers or other equipment be required or provided for pick up of recyclables?
5. How will the program be handled during the summer months and/or holiday breaks?
6. Will a decrease in the amount of material going to disposal help cover the costs of recycling?

We need your help!
The U.S. paper industry has set a goal to exceed 70 percent recovery by 2020, part of an encompassing set of sustainability goals, Better Practices, Better Planet 2020. Learn more at afandpa.org/sustainability.
Design a program

Generate school administration support. Crucial to the success of your program is the support and buy-in of both the school administration and the custodial staff. Be sure to engage both as you formulate a plan.

Use the data gathered during the audit, along with input from recycling collectors and 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. Share this information with the school administration and staff to build ownership and interest in the program.

Designate a coordinator. Appoint a recycling coordinator and supporting team to help bring the program to life. 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 the administrative and custodial staff to create a collection system that encourages student participation and ensures that recyclable materials are kept clean.

A few considerations:

- **Containers** – How many, how big, and where should they be located?
- **Collection points** – How and where will recyclables be collected and stored between pick-ups?
- **Staff training** – Work with custodial staff to determine a manageable collection system and ensure proper equipment and training is included.
- **Signage** – Engage students in creating signs that promote paper and paper-based packaging recycling and heighten program visibility.

For example...

At Damascus Elementary School in Salem, OH, students oversee a paper recycling program that includes a recycling bin in every classroom, the office, cafeteria, library and teacher’s lounge. Furthering the educational value of the program, recycling is integrated into every aspect of the curriculum, going beyond the classroom to include lunch time and morning announcements as teachable moments.
Start it up!

Phase it in. Smaller schools may be able to start the program all at once. For larger schools, begin with a short pilot 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.

Kick it off! A kick-off event that includes students, faculty, custodial staff, parents and community recycling leaders provides the opportunity to build awareness, encourage program ownership and educate your audience about what and how to recycle.

Education is essential. Be sure to include funds for outreach education when budgeting for your recycling program.

Streamline your brochures, signage, website and social media efforts and use clear, active language. Involve the students in creating signs, slogans and campaigns to promote paper and paper-based packaging recycling among their peers. Use the school newspaper, website, Facebook page and student orientation to reinforce the importance of recycling at school. Take every opportunity to communicate the progress and success of the recycling program and praise positive actions.

For example...
Wake County, NC, reinvested some of the savings from its district-wide FEED THE BIN program to hire staff and create age-appropriate education materials, yielding even greater success.

SPOTLIGHT:
Perry High School, Perry, OH
2012 AF&PA School Recycling Award

Student involvement and continuous expansion are the keys to paper recycling success at Perry High School. Recycling events, education and outreach to fellow students and community members, along with collaboration with a wide array of classes and school clubs have all contributed to the current success of the paper recycling program. In 2011, the program generated an impressive 466 pounds of paper and paper-based packaging per student, thanks to school and community participation. For details, please visit paperrecycles.org.
Measure and share your results

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. This can include:

- Quantity of paper and paper-based packaging recovered for recycling
- Cost savings
- Quality insights from the collector
- Percentage of students and/or classrooms, offices, libraries or other entities participating

Just as important as tracking this information – use it as an incentive to encourage the school community to do more! Options can include:

- Recognizing outstanding student, faculty or staff efforts at school gatherings and on social media
- Providing regular updates to parents and the community
- Entering the program in contests that provide national visibility and recognition

Share your success!
Want to gain national and local attention for your paper recycling success? Apply for an annual AF&PA Recycling Award, which recognizes outstanding community, business and school paper recovery programs. Find award criteria and prize and deadline details — along with highlights on previous winners — on paperrecycles.org.

Repeat. Repeat.

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

- **Make it fun** – Motivate students with contests, classroom rewards and personal recognition for achieving recycling goals.
- **Build in flexibility** – 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’s not? What would improve participation?
- **Include everyone** – Ensure that the program is not dependent on one champion to succeed.
- **Solve the “summer months” problem** – Determine up front with the recycler how to handle the fluctuation in recyclables during school holidays and breaks.
SPOTLIGHT:

Purdy High School, Purdy, MO
2011 AF&PA School Recycling Award

The Purdy High School recycling program in South-west Missouri was initiated in 2005, with a dual goal of providing a service to the community and raising funds for the Spanish Club. Just five years later, this self-sustaining program successfully recovered 26 tons of paper while providing rigorous academic integration and education for the community at large. Learn more about this program at paperrecycles.org.

Want to learn more?

The paperrecycles.org website features additional resources to bring paper recycling to life in your classroom. From free lesson plans and classroom activities to statistics, videos and best practices from successful school paper recycling programs, the site is your one-stop shop for information.