

## Reducing and recycling of plastic waste in schools\*

Many people rely on the benefits offered by plastic products. Plastic bags, food packaging and containers are common plastics used in schools. Oklahoma State University reports that one school-aged student who uses disposable lunch products creates 67 pounds of waste during a nine-month school year. Essentially, one middle school with an average number of students can create more than 30,000 pounds of waste in the lunchroom alone. Many school districts are looking to ways to reduce, reuse and recycle disposable plastics in lunchrooms and classrooms.

Several methods for plastic reduction exist for schools. Teachers, students and school administrators can use creativity when developing reduction projects. While recycling bins offer a common approach to plastic recycling, the student body and staff can expand the reduction practice by reusing and reducing the amount of plastics in the school system.

One of the simplest methods to reduce plastic usage in the lunchroom includes using washable containers. For example, a school's administration could include washable lunch boxes on the school supply list. In addition, schools can encourage parents to use washable drink containers, metal serving cups (for fruits or puddings, for example) and reusable cutlery. These items return home with each student for washing and reuse another day.

Teachers and students can gather to create positive methods for reusing plastics. For example, teachers can discuss starting a garden on the school's property that incorporates household waste items to improve the gardens production. The class can commission plastic products, such as fruit cups, to start seedlings in the garden. Participants can use plastic spoons and forks as digging tools or for marking the location of specific plants. Plastic newspaper sleeves may act as tents that create a greenhouse effect when starting new plants.

A school's administration can follow some simple guidelines for waste reduction in the cafeteria. One suggestion is to allow students to select what they receive instead of forcing specific food options. Students who choose their lunch items are more likely to consume them. Consequently, a school will experience less food and plastic container waste. Schools might consider purchasing bulk condiment containers, which reduce the use of individual plastic serving packets. Providing staff with access to dishwashing supplies can reduce the amount of plastic or foam drink containers. Finally, schools can remove plastic drinking straws from the list of available utensils.

Parents can assist schools by advocating for a waste audit. Performing an audit provides several benefits, including identifying ways that a school can save money. Staff can perform the audit by participating in a tour of the campus, reviewing recently disposed items and speaking with janitorial and lunchroom staff. Once the audit is complete, the school can design a waste reduction plan.

Collection events offer a relatively inexpensive method to reduce and recycle plastic. Participants can arrange a bi-annual event, for example, that encourages students and adults to drop off recyclable plastics. Volunteers can transport the collected materials to the nearest recycling facility. Group events work well for collecting plastics, cardboard and glass products.

The benefits of starting plastic reduction programs outweigh the initial effort. Students and adults learn about protecting the environment and possibly transfer the same waste-reduction techniques to their own homes. Students also gain access to opportunities to participate in service-based community events. For example, students might decide to begin waste reduction drives in their own communities. Finally, reducing plastic usage in schools decreases the costs of waste removal, energy consumption, trash generation and greenhouse gas emissions.

Find out more about reducing plastic usage at school by reviewing the following resources:

- [Tools To Reduce Waste In Schools](#)
- [Tips on Waste Reduction & Reuse for Schools](#)
- [Recycling and Waste Reduction: A Guide for Schools](#)

- [Recycling and Waste Reduction at Work or School](#)
- [All About Foam Plastics](#)
- [Ideas for Reducing Plastic at School](#)
- [Tips to Use Less Plastic](#)
- [The Ocean is Turning into a Plastic Soup](#)
- [Reduce Waste: Plastic](#)
- [Is a Ban the Best Way to Reduce Plastic Bag Use?](#)
- [Recycling Plastic Milk Bottles at School](#)
- [A Guide for Implementing a School Recycling Program](#)
- [Waste to Wealth: Recycling in Schools to Eliminate the Plastic Waste Menace in Ghana](#)
- [Reuse + Recycling = Waste Reduction: A Guide for Schools & Groups](#)
- [School Recycling Made Easy](#)
- [Organizing Cafeteria Recycling Programs in Elementary Schools](#)
- [Food Service/Cafeteria Waste Reduction Suggestions & Guidance](#)
- [Zero Waste: A Realistic Sustainability Program for Schools](#)
- [Recycling Plastics](#)
- [Introducing Plastics](#)
- [Recycling Plastic: Complications & Limitations](#)
- [Understanding Plastic Recycling](#)
- [Recycling Household Products into Your Garden or Landscape](#)
- [Waste-Free Lunch](#)
- [Plastic Free Campuses](#)

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