

Best Practices Guide for Sustainability: Waste Reduction

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I. Introduction

A primary focus of PTSA is the health and well-being of every child.

It is recognized by the Washington State PTA that human activity is changing the global climate. Effects of climate change are a threat to the health and well-being of children, who are a particularly vulnerable population. Actions we take to create an environmentally sustainable future are important to children and families.

“PTA members have a responsibility to promote environmental health and safety, and to help protect our world’s finite natural resources, now.”

- WA State PTA, Resolution 11.28, 2018

Our choices and actions influence whether we will have a sustainable environment in the future. We can do things today that both meet our current needs and help ensure future generations can meet their needs. In the classroom, students learn about

environmental sustainability. Eco-friendly best practices such as “reduce, re-use and recycle” are a way to put those classroom lessons into action.

The Lake Washington PTSA Council Sustainability Committee put together this *Best Practices Guide* to help PTAs reduce the waste impacting our environment and our climate. These practices, put into action through decisions and activities, are steps we can take to create a healthier and more livable planet for our children.

II. Keys to success for implementing Best Practices

Educate your own PTSA about why these sustainability efforts are important. Stay focused on the students and the importance of putting into practice the values that are taught in the classroom.

- Encourage teacher, staff, and student champions! Keep them in the loop so they can provide important feedback, be a liaison to staff, and support best practices within the school.
- With LWSD staff, sometimes they are happier taking actions on their own and sometimes they are eager to partner. If they want to partner, you can encourage them, ask what their plan is (which sometimes identifies that there is no plan), or offer to help facilitate green team, environmental club, or similar. However, always keep in mind whether you are supporting the mission and vision of the PTSA while doing this.
- Ask the King County Green Schools Program for help. For schools that sign up to participate, the program provides hands-on assistance, resources such as indoor recycling bins and signs, can help educating students and staff members, and recognition of school achievements. See www.kingcounty.gov/GreenSchools
- Coordinate with your PTSA board and membership, school principal, custodian and event chairs regarding event or program logistics. Check in regularly with your custodian.
 - Be clear about what items your school's waste collection hauler accepts for recycling and composting.
- Incorporate a statement about environmental sustainability into your PTSA's mission or vision.
 - Example: The _____ PTSA supports and celebrates partnerships, programs and events that enrich the educational experience and community of students, teachers and parents while actively working to reduce our environmental impact, improve health and create a more livable planet.

III. Waste Reduction Best Practices

When kids ask us grown-ups what we're doing to help leave them a better world, we can say we are being mindful of our purchases and producing less waste. There are many opportunities to reduce waste, including during:

- Classroom activities and parties;
- School-wide events such as carnivals, festivals, and fairs;
- Fundraisers; and
- Luncheons for awards and staff appreciation.

Planning your event

Simple Actions:

- Talk to your PTSA board and your event team(s) about the importance of waste reduction. Encourage them to use these best practices for all PTSA events. See the Sample Communication Script to help share your goals (see Additional Resources section).
- In planning sustainability events (like Earth Week), work with your PTSA board on scheduling and raising awareness.
- Use electronic and website resources for promoting events and signups to minimize the use of paper. Digital ads or reusable signs generate less waste than paper flyers.
- When advertising, be up-front with the school community that you want to have a more sustainable event and are trying to minimize waste, and then ask them to take certain actions, like bringing a reusable water bottle or carpooling.
- At the event, again make an announcement that your intention is a low-waste event. Direct people's attention to the waste systems and choices you have made and ask them to help make the event a success.
- Coordinate with your school's custodian to have bins to collect trash, recyclable materials, and compostable materials.
- Always have bins arranged in groups of three at "waste stations", with a trash, recycling, and compost (if applicable) bin available together. Place easy-to-understand signage at eye level behind the bins.

Take it up a notch:

- Encourage carpooling and walking to the event.
- Signage at your waste stations can show actual items present at the event. Elementary students may enjoy helping create signs by taping items to poster

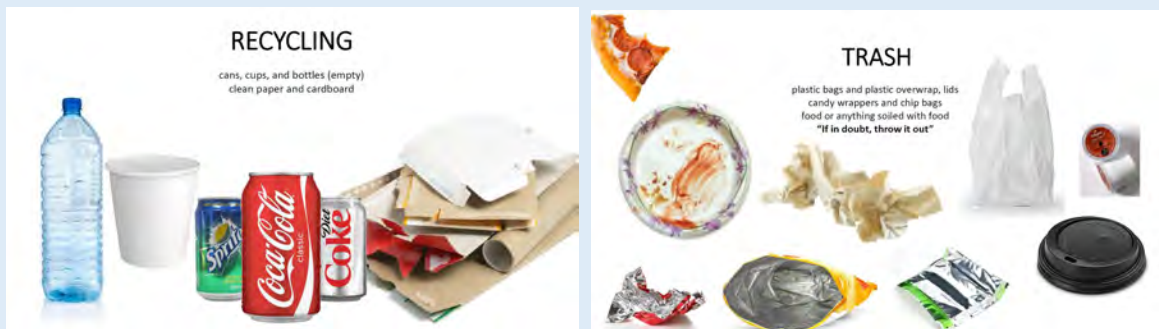
board. Middle and high school students may prefer printed signs. Showing actual items present at the event helps eliminate confusion and encourages proper recycling and composting.

- Laminate signage so that you can keep it and reuse it at your next event.

Real Examples

These simple signs were created by doing an image search for terms like “aluminum can” and “flattened boxes”. Images with a transparent or white background were then pasted into Google Slides. (You could also use Canva or Microsoft PowerPoint.) The signs were then printed on 8.5x11 paper. You could also laminate them, if you wanted. This simple action *greatly* reduced contamination.

Text takes time to read. Try to make your signs immediately clear without depending on text.

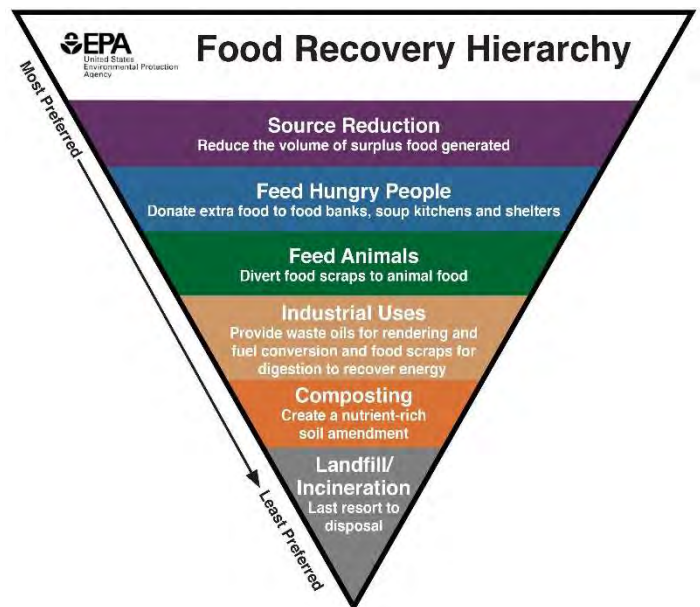


Purchasing items for your event

Simple Actions:

- **Plates, Utensils, Napkins, Beverage Containers**
 - For events, encourage people to bring their own reusable beverage containers, plates, and cutlery. For classroom parties, each student could bring in a reusable plate, cup, bowl, utensil, etc. to use throughout the year. (Be sure to involve students in the cleaning process!) These reusable items could be left in classrooms for future years or brought home at the end of each year. The same could be done with teachers and staff for staff appreciation and other teacher events that involve food.
 - Use reusable (washable) plates, utensils, etc. whenever possible.
 - If you have composting service, you can use compostable or wooden stir sticks instead of plastic ones.
 - If reusable serving ware is not available and your school collects compost, go with compostables!
 - Compostable utensils, plates, cups, napkins, etc. must be within Cedar Grove Composting guidelines, if your school is serviced by Cedar Grove.
 - Cedar Grove will only accept products with CMA-I certification. This certification uses a testing process that takes place in the field and so indicates products that are proven to break down in real-world scenarios.
 - Cedar Grove will accept BPI certified composting products only if they are *also* CMA-I certified. Cedar Grove does not accept products with *only* BPI certification.
 - Acceptable products should also be either brown, green, or beige colored or striped and must say "compostable" on them (as required by state law).
 - For more information, see this page: <https://cedar-grove.com/accepted-commercial-items>
 - If composting, ask all food vendors to serve food on compostable plates and use compostable utensils.
 - If composting, recruit someone (a student, staff member, or parent) to monitor each waste bin station. Provide disposable gloves and a [grabber](#) or [tongs](#) for them to use! If the bins become contaminated with non-compostable materials, then the whole bin may need to be thrown into the trash.
 - Use reusable, recyclable or compostable beverage containers. (Compostable cups need to be accepted by Cedar Grove. See above for guidelines on acceptable products.)

- Avoid single-use, disposable drink pouches, straws, and single-serve coffee pods. (Stainless steel coffee pods are an option, as are compostable straws made from paper, corn, and even avocado pits!)
- Ditch the bottled water! Use drinking fountains, tap water, pitchers, and water coolers to avoid using single-use, plastic water bottles. Let everyone know that they need to bring their own water bottle to events, or they can simply drink out of the water fountain. Offer compostable cups if needed.
- **Decorations and Supplies**
 - Reconsider decorations. What do you need and what can you eliminate? If you need an item, can you get a reusable version instead of a disposable one? For example, cloth table clothes that are laundered by a volunteer and then stored in the PTSA supply closet instead of disposable plastic tablecloths.
 - Consider a “lending closet” for events that all clubs and the PTSA can use. Only buy an item once and then share it!
 - Or ask friends and neighbors if they have an item you can borrow.
- **Prizes**
 - Reduce purchases of plastics for prizes. Consider non-plastic alternatives (see Additional Resources for more ideas).
- **Food**
 - If hiring food trucks, ask them what options they have to reduce waste, reduce environmental impact, or to offer compostable disposables.
 - If holding a potluck, estimate your needs carefully to make sure there isn't too much leftover food. Ask people not to over-provide.
 - Dispose of leftover food in the best way that you can. (See Food Recovery Hierarchy. It is better not to create waste at all, then feed people, then feed animals, then compost.



https://19january2021snapshot.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/food-recovery-hierarchy_.html.)

Take it up a notch:

- Purchase locally sourced and/or pesticide-free food.
- Consider not using any beef.
- Or even consider not using any meat at all!
- Eliminate physical, single-use prizes, whether plastic or not. Consider public recognition or experience prizes instead (see Additional Resources for more ideas).

Communication/Education

Simple Actions:

- Clear, simple signs help people understand what goes where.
- Post guidelines near all waste bins for easy reference about which items go into which containers. Three-dimensional signs that include the actual items glued to a sign are most helpful. If bins are not appropriately used, everything could be thrown out as garbage due to contamination. Custodians typically do not have time (or desire!) to sort through waste bins.
- Signs should be at eye level. Tape them to a convenient wall behind the bins or attach them to [wooden garden stakes](#) that are inserted between the bin and the bag.
- Make an announcement with verbal instructions regarding sorting at the beginning of the event. Make sure that everyone contributing to and attending the event knows about your eco-friendly expectations so they can help with the success of reducing, reusing, composting, and recycling.

Take it up a notch:

- Have a volunteer (parent, student, etc.) stationed at waste bins during the event to help guide people in using the correct bins for their waste.
- Short, easy-to-understand slogans can help
 - “If you can eat it, you can compost it”
 - “If in doubt, throw it out”
- Consider accessibility. Having information in other languages such as Spanish is welcoming and increases accessibility.
- Reinforce the message of waste reduction throughout the year by encouraging students and everyone at school events to only take what they’ll eat and eat what they take!
- Educate students and staff about the impact of plastic straws and single-use plastic bottles, cups, and packaging.

Cleanup Time

Simple Actions:

- Remind people to plan to take their leftovers home.
- Have compostable bags or reusable containers on hand in case people want to take leftovers home.
- Or find a local farm that will accept leftovers! (There will be some foods that must be excluded, such as citrus and onions; coordinate with your local farmer.)
- Compost food if it's no longer edible and composting is available.
- Staff may be happy to eat up leftovers, but remember to pre-coordinate access to a staff room fridge in order to leave leftovers for them. You may also want to buy some reusable containers for the staff room in order to be able to leave these leftovers.

Take it up a notch:

- Donate leftover food to a food bank or shelter. (See Additional Resources)
- Make it a group activity (preferably involving students) to wash re-useable dishes before the end of the event.
- Save the re-useable dishes for the next school or classroom event.

Keep it going!

- Evaluate successes and challenges with waste reduction efforts.
- Take pictures to record efforts, track progress and compare over time.
- Report and promote your successes at meetings and in newsletters. Share with PTSA Council and District Communications teams.
- Promote friendly, eco-awareness competitions!
- Train new volunteers about waste reduction goals and best practices.
- Have a PTSA waste reduction point person to answer questions (e.g. Green Team student or PTSA Sustainability Committee Chair).
- Gather feedback from PTSA event and program chairs, parents, teachers/staff, custodians, and students about how to improve these best practices for your school community.

IV. Additional Resources

Website Resources

National PTA Position Statement - Environmental Health, Remediation, Sustainability and Climate Change <https://www.pta.org/home/advocacy/ptas-positions/Individual-Position-Statements/Position-Statement-Environmental-Health-Remediation-Sustainability-and-Climate-Change>

WA State PTA 2018 Resolution 11.28 "Mitigating the Health Effects of Climate Change" <https://www.wastatepta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WSPTA-Resolution-11.28-Mitigating-Effects-of-Climate-Change-2020.pdf>

King County Solid Waste Division – "What do I do with..." – to find a food bank in your area that accepts food donations. <https://info.kingcounty.gov/services/recycling-garbage/solid-waste/what-do-i-do-with/Search?q=113>

Green Schools Program provided by King County:

- Waste reduction benchmark, criteria, resources, and activities:

<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dnrp/waste-services/garbage-recycling-compost/solid-waste-programs/green-schools/program-benchmarks/waste-reduction>

- Recycling benchmark, criteria, resources, and activities:

<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dnrp/waste-services/garbage-recycling-compost/solid-waste-programs/green-schools/program-benchmarks/recycling-collection>

- Food waste reduction benchmark, criteria, resources, and activities:

<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dnrp/waste-services/garbage-recycling-compost/solid-waste-programs/green-schools/program-benchmarks/food-waste-reduction>

- Organics collection (composting) benchmark, criteria, resources, and activities:

<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dnrp/waste-services/garbage-recycling-compost/solid-waste-programs/green-schools/program-benchmarks/organics-collection>

School Green Teams through King County:

<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dnrp/waste-services/garbage-recycling-compost/solid-waste-programs/green-schools/student-green-teams>

Free School Assembly and Workshop Program (K-5 and 6-12) for King County Schools (non-Seattle): <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dnrp/waste-services/garbage-recycling-compost/solid-waste-programs/school-programs>

Student Activity Guides through King County:

<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dnrp/waste-services/garbage-recycling-compost/solid-waste-programs/school-programs/activity-guides>

Environmental Education Programs (water resource programs are free)

<https://naturevision.org/>

King County-Cities Climate Collaboration

<https://www.kingcounty.gov/services/environment/climate/strategies/k4c.aspx>

Cedar Grove Composting

- Cedar Grove school soil donation program (for schools with service with Cedar Grove): <https://cedar-grove.com/school-soil-program>

- Cedar Grove YouTube channel with explanatory videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/cedargrovecompost>

- List of accepted compostable products by type of product, brand, and item #:

<https://cedar-grove.com/compostable/accepted-items>

Non-plastic Prize Ideas (for various grade levels):

1. Tickets to a school event or dance
2. Lunch with a teacher, staff member or principal
3. Homework pass
4. Popcorn party
5. Smoothie party
6. Reusable stainless cups and/or straws
7. Gift cards to the movies
8. First-class dining in the cafeteria
9. Gift cards to a local restaurant or café
10. Organic lollipops (to replace candy with artificial ingredients)
11. Schools signed up for Cedar Grove composting services can receive one auction certificate a year for use in fundraising: <https://cedar-grove.com/school-soil-program>
12. Check this site for a long list of incentives: <https://www.pbisrewards.com/pbis-incentives/>

Sample Script for Communications

Hello! Our school is working to create a healthier planet by reducing the amount of waste we send to the landfill and keeping our oceans clean. Please work with us by following best practices for waste reduction!

We will use compostable (or reusable) plates, napkins, and utensils (provide details). When you compost and recycle, please take time to sort waste into the appropriate bins. Use the signs as a reference. Students – please note that the adults may need help with this part. Feel free to lend them a hand. Please only take what you'll eat and eat all that you take. If there are leftovers, feel free to take them home! There will be eco-friendly to-go bags.

Thank you for doing your part to reduce waste and help our planet. It's the only one we've got.

If you have questions or suggestions or if you want to learn more about adding a Sustainability Chair to your school's PTSA, please email sustainability@lwptsa.net.