

Providing Nutritious Food to Texans While Acting as Good Stewards of Valuable Resources

School nutrition professionals may find that leftovers present a challenge regardless of efforts to plan for efficiency and prepare appealing meals.

Recognizing the challenges, TDA has provided resources for food-waste-reduction strategies that maximize the value of school meal leftovers on the National School Lunch Program Resource page. Visit SquareMeals.org/NSLP and click on the Resources tab.

Using these tips will enable school nutrition professionals to provide added nutrition for Texas while acting as good stewards of valuable resources!

Below you can learn more about the recycling efforts of two school districts and how those efforts benefitted the students.



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Food and Nutrition Division
Nutrition Assistance Programs

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Hays CISD Takes Composting, Recycling Districtwide

Since 2011, Hays Consolidated Independent School District (Hays CISD) has used composting and recycling at all of the district's 23 schools. As the program has matured, landfill diversion rates have increased each year.

Elm Grove Elementary, in particular, has consistently high diversion numbers, both in compost and recycling. More than just numbers though, Elm Grove Elementary has developed a culture for diversion that captures the buy-in of both students and staff.

The school has created a "green team," which students consider a privilege to be a part of. This team is responsible for removing recyclables from each classroom on a weekly basis. Throughout the hallways the school displays messages of environmental preservation and the importance of recycling and composting.

In the cafeteria, staff help students decide which items go into the recycle, compost or landfill containers. It's less about cycling students through the line and more about teaching them the "why" so they can sort the items on their own next time.

According to the district's waste disposal partner, Texas Disposal Systems, Elm Grove Elementary had diverted 50,744 pounds of waste from the landfill so far!

Eastside High Students Help Peers Learn Recycling

At Eastside Memorial High School, students have become instructors helping teach everyone on campus how to reduce the amount of waste the Austin school sends to the landfill. The students worked with administrators and local environmental organizations to produce impressive results.

“Eastside Memorial High School is the first National Wildlife Federation Green Flag eco-school in Texas and we were awarded Keep Austin Beautiful’s 2016 Zero Waste Champion award,” said Math Teacher Amanda Mortl.

Students with a variety of educational interests have worked to increase recycling and composting awareness in most areas at the school, including the cafeteria. Construction Tech students built 3D display boards for the cafeteria and other campus sites to remind everyone which waste is recyclable or compostable.

Environmental Systems students went into classrooms and offered bilingual instruction about the benefits of zero-waste and appropriate disposal. Environmental Science students monitored the cafeteria trash cans and guided their peers on making the proper waste disposal decisions after lunch.



Administrators supported these efforts in a variety of ways including conducting a waste audit that found that 82 percent of the classroom landfill waste was actually recyclable or compostable. The school also replaced one of the landfill dumpsters with a compost dumpster.

“By far, the most effective new practice is peer-to-peer education,” Mortl said. “If a monitor is standing by the cans during lunch helping others, there is virtually no waste in the landfill can afterwards. Also, we are proud to be the first comprehensive high school in Austin Independent School District to have access to a commercial composting system.

“We hope that our efforts towards inclusivity in our diverse community will be emulated to support the most people possible in other locations,” she added. “We look forward to helping other schools be less wasteful by providing an example to be followed and improving our recycling and composting rates in the future.