

RECYCLING IN SCHOOL

Making it Part of the Lesson Plan



Kids in classrooms today are the citizens of tomorrow. Part of being a good citizen is taking care of the environment. Recycling at school is good training for future citizens, teaching them to value materials and to use them wisely. Recycling is also important to North Carolina's economy, and school recycling helps students contribute to our state's prosperity. North Carolina schools are prime candidates for recycling, not only because they are large generators of recyclable materials but also because they may have opportunities to reduce solid waste costs. This fact sheet outlines the principles of a good school recycling program and the steps school systems can take to reduce, reuse, and recycle.

Program Costs and Financing*

Recycling collection will likely cost money. Although recyclable materials are more valuable than trash, their value does not cover the cost of getting them from schools to recycling facilities. You may therefore have recycling service charges that need to be budgeted for. So how can you afford to recycle? Start by looking at your trash.

Recycling will take a lot of material directly out of your trash dumpsters, meaning they don't need to be emptied as often or be as big. Look closely at your trash service contract, the numbers and sizes of your containers, and the frequency of collection. Use your recycling program to "right-size" your trash service and to help save money to afford recycling service charges.

Here are some other possible sources of financial assistance:

- County and municipal recycling programs may be able to share resources, provide inexpensive pickup services, or offer other financial support.
- State recycling grants can be used to fund school recycling programs, but your county or municipality must be the one to apply on your behalf.
- Local businesses, community groups, and foundations may also provide funds for collection bins and other equipment.

Other Key Issues

- Understand what materials can be readily accepted for recycling and periodically check with your recycling service provider to stay on top of the newest recycling opportunities.
- Expect to be able to commingle your recyclable materials, which can be separated later at Material Recovery Facilities. Commingling requires fewer collection bins, making recycling more affordable.
- Think ahead to other things you can do to reduce waste and costs, such as preventing food leftovers or composting organics.

*(See case studies on back)

Features of Successful School Recycling Programs

The best school recycling programs have some key factors in common, including:

- A district-level approach that makes sure each individual school is on board and is coordinated with the other schools.
- Cost-effective contracts for solid waste and recycling collection.
- A dedicated person, either within the school system or in conjunction the county solid waste department, who can focus on school waste reduction and recycling.
- A team to help address the details of implementing a successful program. The team can include representatives from the school district's facilities and operations, Child Nutrition Services, custodial staff, individual school representatives, and municipal or county solid waste staff.
- An accessible program that makes collection bins available in classrooms, workrooms, administrative offices, cafeterias, and athletic fields.
- Consistent and clear communication about the program that includes signage, decal containers, classroom presentations and promotions, and other essential information.
- A system of tracking progress of the program.

CASE STUDIES

The Business Case for Recycling

One way to make sure you are on the right track is to learn from peers who have done it right. Here is information on four outstanding programs:

Granville County

Granville County Public Schools divert **231 tons** per year through a very active recycling program for students, staff and school facilities and operations. Items collected include not only traditional recyclables like paper, bottles and cans but also electronics, metals, textiles, books, and metals from unusable office furniture and filing cabinets).

After implementing recycling, the County right-sized their trash service and reduced the disposal costs from \$220,000 per year in 2008 to \$135,000 per year in 2013. In addition, the County was able to market several other materials for \$13,000 in revenues. Utilizing many of the best management practices for school recycling, the County is **saving \$98,000 per year**.



Orange County

In 2014, Orange County Schools conducted a waste audit and inventory as part of a project to expand organics diversion at schools. They found that many locations contracted for twice a week trash collection but those dumpsters were only half full each time. Each time a dumpster is serviced, switching to once a week collection produced **enough cost savings** to purchase compostable trays to **expand organics diversion** from the cafeterias.

Mecklenburg County

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools recycled almost **2000 tons** per year, saving roughly **\$100,000** and in disposal costs. CMS was the first to implement a carton recycling program, diverting over 2.3 million cartons per year. In 2014, CMS expanded an organics diversion program from 2 schools to 20 schools, cutting the trash bags from the cafeteria in each school from 10-12 bags per day to only 3-4 bags of trash. Schools with organics recycling were able to reduce trash service by between one or two pulls per week.



Rutherford County

To offset rising disposal costs from the schools, Rutherford County Schools worked with the County Solid Waste Office to hire a part time Recycling Coordinator to start a recycling program. The first year of the program, they diverted **114 tons** and each school was able to reduce the trash service by at least one pull per week. The trash contract was renegotiated and the savings essentially offset the cost of recycling.

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

DENR's Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service (DEACS) provides free technical assistance and is the source of state grant funding to expand school recycling.

Visit <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/deao/recycling/school-recycling>.

DEACS also has some free promotional and educational materials through the Recycle Guys campaign for schools to use.

Visit www.recycleguys.org for order forms and activity downloads.

