

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

A sustainable future is considerate of the environment through our choices and actions. 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.
- 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:

- 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.
- Reduce purchases of plastics for prizes. Consider non-plastic alternatives (see Additional Resources for more ideas).
- 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 for teachers for staff appreciation and other teacher events that involve food.
- Coordinate with your school's custodian about having compost/recycling bins available and managing the pickup.

Take it up a notch:

- Encourage carpooling and walking to the event.

Purchasing items for your event

Simple Actions:

- Plates/Utensils/Napkins – if composting is available at your school
 - Compostable plates are uncoated, uncolored, plain paper.
 - Compostable utensils must be within Cedar Grove/Waste Management guidelines.
 - Plain white or unbleached napkins can be composted.
 - Ask all food vendors to serve food on compostable plates and use compostable utensils.
- Beverage containers
 - Use reusable, recyclable or compostable containers (compostable cups need to be approved by Waste Management)

- Avoid single-use, disposable drink pouches, straws and single-serve coffee pods (stainless steel coffee pods are an option, as are straws made from paper, corn, and even avocado pits!).
- Ditch the bottled water! Use 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.

Take it up a notch:

- Purchase locally sourced and/or organic food.
- Consider not using any beef.
- Educate students and staff about the impact of plastic straws.

Communication/Education

Simple Actions:

- Signs help people understand what goes where. Post guidelines near all waste bins for easy reference about which items go into which containers. If bins are not appropriately used, everything could be thrown out as garbage due to contamination. Custodians do not typically have time to sort through waste bins.
- Provide 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.
- Use electronic and website resources for promoting events and signups to minimize the use of paper.
- 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!

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.

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 share leftovers.
- Compost food if it's no longer edible and composting is available.

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!

Simple Actions:

- Evaluate successes and challenges with waste reduction efforts.
 - Take pictures to record efforts, track progress and compare over time.
- Report and promote successes at meetings and in newsletters. Share with PTSA Council and District Communications teams.
- Promote friendly, eco-awareness competitions!

Take it up a notch:

- Train new volunteers about waste reduction goals and best practices.
- Have a PTSA waste reduction point person to answer questions (eg. 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/2018/10/Resolutions-v10.21.18-1.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 through King County – Waste Reduction Information

<https://kingcounty.gov/depts/dnrp/solid-waste/programs/greenschools.aspx>

Elementary School Green Teams through King County

<https://kingcounty.gov/depts/dnrp/solid-waste/programs/education/elementary-school/greenteams.aspx>

Free School Assembly Program for King County Elementary Schools (non-Seattle)

<https://kingcounty.gov/depts/dnrp/solid-waste/programs/education/elementary-school/assembly.aspx>

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>

Waste Management/Cedar Grove guidelines: <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. 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 want to learn more about adding a Sustainability Chair to your school's PTSA, please email sustainability@lwptsa.net.