

RESIDENTIAL RECYCLING INITIATIVE

GUIDE: HOW TO START A SCHOOL RECYCLING PROGRAM



WHY RECYCLE?

Our waste doesn't disappear when it leaves the curb or loading dock. In 2017, over 50 million cubic yards were landfilled in Michigan – 1.5 million cubic yards more than in 2016. What does this mean? It means that we threw away enough stuff to pack the Michigan State University football stadium to the brim with compacted waste over 95 times. And this disposal trend has been increasing each year, but it doesn't have to be that way!

How do we generate so much waste? The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that a single person produces about five pounds of waste per day. However, a good portion of things we send to the landfill aren't waste at all. In fact, about 40 percent of what we landfill is standard recyclables. If Michigan began to recover these materials, we could divert 20 million cubic yards into resources to drive our economy while preserving our landfill space.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SCHOOLS?

With most school districts in Michigan serving 3,000 or more students, schools are in a unique position to not only provide education about our waste systems, but also significantly reduce the amount of resources wasted in Michigan.

How will recycling help the school district and students?

- Depending on your waste and recycling services contract, recycling could save your school money.
- By implementing a school recycling program, students are offered hands-on learning about recycling and waste minimization. Active recycling also puts theory into practice for staff and families.

WHO SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD ON STARTING A RECYCLING PROGRAM AT THE SCHOOL?

Programs with long-term success are most often led by school administration. Relying on parent or student champions that come and go through the years is challenging and creates more work in the long run.

Use this guide to help establish or improve on your school's recycling program.

1 *Figure out what services are included in the current waste hauling contract.*

Every school has a contract for waste hauling services. It's not uncommon for the contract to be automatically renewed for years without review or discussion. This is an opportunity to discuss contract cost and changes. Waste haulers can present various options to fit a school's needs.



A charge for recycling services is normal, so don't be surprised if adding recycling comes with a service fee. While recycling isn't free, there may be ways to reduce the cost of waste services. Ask your waste hauler about having the dumpster emptied when full instead of a set number of times. By increasing recycling, the school will minimize the amount of trash thrown away and save hauling fees.

Confused about why recycling service costs money? Check out EGLE's "Why Recycling Costs Money" flyer to learn more.

2 *Build administrative, staff, and student support.*

When proposing a new program, tailor the conversation to the individual you are speaking to. While discussing with administrators, talk about the potential to reduce waste hauling costs through increasing recycling and changing how waste is collected. Discuss the potential to work toward becoming a Michigan Green School and leader. When meeting custodial staff, seek their input about what types of recyclable materials the school generates, and engage them in planning. Discuss the new program with students and put together a "Green Team". The Green Team may help with presentations to administration on the benefits of the new program. Use all the enthusiasm and resources at your fingertips to demonstrate why recycling is right for your school.



3 *Design a program.*

Determine what type of recycling program is best for your school and create a proposal. Administration, custodial staff, the Green Team, and a recycling service provider representative are a great team to identify the best program ideas and see them through to long-term implementation.



When designing a program, consider these steps and discussion points:

- ***What recyclable materials should be collected?*** Work with custodial staff to better understand the types of recyclables the school generates. A popular technique is to perform a waste audit, which is an organized analysis of the school waste stream by sorting disposed materials into certain categories, weighing the materials, and then reviewing what recyclable items are most commonly thrown away.
- ***What are the recycling bin/cart needs in the classroom, offices, and cafeteria?*** How many are needed? How big do they need to be? Where will they be located?
- ***How much space is available in the loading dock?*** Is there space to store recyclables for pick-up? Discuss ideas and seek input from your waste hauler and custodial staff if there are storage issues.
- ***How will the program be kicked-off?*** Will it be phased in? How will the school highlight the new recycling program? Can you feature information in the morning announcements? Can the Green Team drop by classrooms to provide information about the new program? Can the school host an assembly to share information about the new program?
- ***How to prioritize training, education, and signage?*** At the beginning of each school year host a meeting about the recycling program to remind all staff members how it works. Work with the Green Team to develop education about the program for students, design signage, and increase school pride and education about the program.

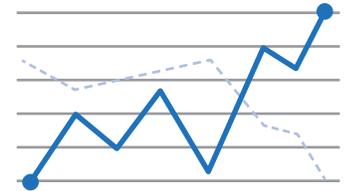
4 Take advantage of special collection programs to further boost recycling efforts.

Special collection programs can supplement standard recycling and help keep even more materials out of the landfill. The cost of the programs listed below is covered by conscientious companies, so there is no fee for your school to participate. Some even offer fundraising and gift cards!

- **Paper Gator:** Your school is paid to collect paper products and place them in a bin for recycling. Visit papergatorrecycling.com for more information.
- **National Crayon Recycling Program:** Pack up broken and unwanted crayons and mail them in to be recycled into new crayons. Visit crazycrayons.com/crayon-recycle-program for more information.
- **Terra Cycle free recycling programs:** For everything from drink pouch recycling to granola bar wrapper recycling. Visit www.terracecycle.com/en-US/brigades for more information.
- **My School Recycles:** Office Depot program accepting empty ink cartridges and small electronics. Schools are rewarded for the value of ink/toner cartridges with Office Depot gift cards. Visit www.myschoolrecycles.com/home.aspx for more information.

5 Measure the progress and share results!

Work with the recycling service provider and custodial staff to gather information on the effectiveness of the new program and the amount of material being diverted. This could include volume tracking, participation tracking, and potential cost savings. Share progress with staff, students, and administration to highlight the positive impacts of the new program.



Have fun and be inspired!

- **Reduce and Reuse:**
 - Teach students how to pack a waste-free lunch. See an example from the Environmental Protection Agency here: www.epa.gov/students/pack-waste-free-lunch
 - Create re-use bins in classrooms. Scraps of construction paper from a craft or unwanted school supplies? Throw them in the bin and have the class use them on their next project.
- **Close the recycling loop:**
 - Work with the school spirit store to support stocking school t-shirts made from recycled plastic bottles, pencils made from recycled newspaper, pens made from recycled plastic, and more!
- **Celebrate your program:**
 - Recognize outstanding students, faculty, or staff that have been an expert recycler or program supporter.
 - Submit applications for local and national awards to promote school recognition.

Sources:

¹ www.michigan.gov/mirecycles

² www.epa.gov/recycle

³ wmsbf.org/portfolio-item/trash-research-project-msw-economic-impact/

For more information, visit
Michigan.gov/miRecycles