



Food Scrap Collection in Schools – Steps to Success

Establish team and obtain buy-in from all stakeholders

1. Talk with district staff.
 - a. Ask district what support (if any) will be provided to pay for collection service for food scraps and other compostable materials.
 - b. Ask district staff who at your school should be responsible for transporting food scrap/compostable items from the cafeteria or lunch area(s) to outdoor composting bins(s).

*After obtaining district approval, then...

2. Talk with school administrators to obtain support.
3. Talk with custodians and food service staff to obtain input and support.
4. Talk with interested teachers, students or student team(s), and parents.
5. Identify a lead – a teacher or administrator who will lead and be responsible for setting up and maintaining the project.
6. Determine which student team(s) will commit to monitoring the cafeteria recycling and waste stations and to ongoing education and outreach.

*Ask the King County Green Schools Program for help. After helping more than 150 schools set up and maintain food scrap collection, the program knows that support from the school's principal, custodians, and other staff is critical to success.

Plan

1. **Assess current cafeteria practices.** Is there currently a good system for recycling bottles, cans, and other recyclable materials? How are students dismissed from the cafeteria or how do they exit – and will this work well with food scrap collection? What's working well and what can be improved? **King County Green Schools Program can help assess current practices and make recommendations.**
2. **Assess current cafeteria stations for recycling and garbage collection.** How many stations? Where are they situated in the cafeteria? Is there sufficient space for food scrap containers in the current set up? Will kitchen staff participate? If so, plan for a recycling station in the kitchen.

3. **Recruit monitors.** Monitors may include a student team or teams, individual student volunteers, a class, or volunteer teachers or parents. Recruit sufficient monitors to adequately monitor all cafeteria recycling stations for at least one month after kick-off and to cover unplanned absences.
4. **Train monitors.** Stress that monitors should not pull items from garbage or recycling containers. The role of the monitors is to educate students about what items are and are not recyclable and compostable. [King County Green Schools Program can provide guidance.](#)
5. **Develop monitor schedule.** Some schools rotate monitors so each student only monitors one day per week, or for one week only and then other student groups monitor during week two, etc. Schedule one staff or parent/volunteer lead to be present each day to provide oversight.
6. **Purchase or obtain aprons, t-shirts, lanyards, or other way to identify cafeteria monitors.** Some schools use PTSA funds to make that purchase. [King County Green Schools Program can provide up to 10 student Green Team aprons.](#)
7. **Purchase or obtain indoor food scrap bins.** Ask for input from custodial staff about the size of the indoor food scrap bins. Food waste is heavy, so 20-gallon bins are easier to handle than larger bins. Food scrap bins should be a different color than garbage and recycling bins so students can easily identify which bins to use. [King County Green Schools Program provides school participants with indoor bins up to a \\$250 for schools serving 40% or more free and reduced lunch and up to \\$150 for other schools. Extra bins may be available for larger schools.](#)
8. **Determine if compostable bag liners or regular garbage bags will be used to line indoor food scrap bins.** Some schools are provided with compostable bags by their school districts. Other schools use PTSA funds to buy compostable bags. Some schools use regular garbage bags to line compost bins, then dump the contents into outdoor composting containers and dispose of the bag liners in the garbage.
9. **Decide if a pilot will be conducted. If so, schedule the pilot.** Some schools collect food scraps /compostable paper products for one to two weeks to: (a) assess weekly quantity of compostable materials; and (b) give volunteer monitors and students a chance to test out the system.
10. **Plan outreach campaign – and promote program**
 - (a) **Signs.** [King County Green Schools Program provides participants with container stickers.](#)
 - (b) **3-D Posters.** Have students create 3-D posters with actual items stapled or glued to them. This is a great way for students to learn. For each recycling station, create three posters – one with typical “garbage” items (i.e., straws, bottle caps), one with recyclable materials (empty plastic bottles, aluminum cans, etc.), and one with compostable items (napkins, paper towels, food soiled paper packaging). On the compostable items poster, include photos of typical food items (apple cores, banana peels, bread, etc.) as well as actual compostable paper items.
 - (c) **Hang signs and posters.** The 3-D posters should be placed on the wall behind each recycling station or in the most visual spot closest to the stations. The stickers should be placed on the bins. Monitors can point to the signs and posters to illustrate instructions.
 - (d) **Announcements.** At least two weeks before kick-off, start to educate students and staff about the new program and what items can be recycled and composted. Include messages about waste reduction (i.e., only take what they will eat and drink, then eat and drink what they take, bring lunches from home in durable containers that can be reused, etc.) [King County Green Schools Program provides sample announcements that can be read over the PA system, at an assembly, in classrooms, and during lunch.](#)

(e) Inform teachers and other staff, and ask for their support. Take 5 to 10 minutes at a staff meeting to inform teachers. Ask each teacher to take 5 minutes with their class(es) to review the basics about what materials can and can't be recycled and composted.

(f) Schedule kick-off date.

1. Ask the school district or appropriate school administrator to order collection service.
2. Schedule the date when the hauler will deliver outdoor collection container(s).
3. Conduct education and promotion campaign for two weeks prior to kick-off.

Ask King County Green Schools Program for recommendations and resources.

Start and maintain program!

1. Make announcements for two weeks prior. Make announcements on kick-off day.
2. Have monitors in place for at least one month after the kick-off. Monitors may be needed periodically throughout the school year to remind students about proper sorting.
3. Continue regular promotion and announcements at least once each week throughout the school year. (This is very important!)
4. Monitor contamination in cafeteria bins. Are students placing items in the correct bins? If not, remind students about what materials should be placed in each bin. Continue to remind your school about why waste reduction, recycling, and composting are important.
5. Assess volunteer monitors: Do they need more training or guidance? Do you need to recruit and train additional monitors?
6. Assess collection system: Is it working smoothly? Ask the custodian how it's going. Ask for input to improve the process.
7. Assess outdoor garbage container: Can garbage service be downsized (a small dumpster size or less frequent collection)? Talk with district or custodial staff to make changes in garbage container size or frequency of collection.
8. If the program lead is no longer able to continue leading the program, locate and train a replacement.
9. Calculate improved recycling rate and cost savings. [King County Green Schools Program provides a Recycling Rate Worksheet and can help schools calculate their recycling rates.](#)
10. **Celebrate successes!** Announce improved recycling rate to students, staff, and parents, and recognize the students and staff who helped plan, lead, and set up the program.