

# Zero Waste Schools

## FAQs for Principals



### Why Zero Waste?

Recycling and composting your school's waste has a lot of benefits, including a cleaner building and fewer pests. Recycling connects directly to STEM education and helps students cultivate healthy habits.

Proper sorting will also help you make the most of your Department of Sanitation pick-ups, reducing large piles of trash on your curb. Finally, when you recycle and compost, you help to create a better environment for the whole city.

### Why was my school chosen?

The Department of Sanitation (DSNY) and the Department of Education (DOE) identified two school truck routes along which all schools currently receive organics collection. All schools on these routes will be included in the Zero Waste Schools Initiative.

### Does this program cost anything?

No. You will receive free bins and educational materials for the entire school. The Department of Sanitation's collection services involved in the Zero Waste Schools Initiative are already provided to your school and will continue during this program.

### What does this program mean for my administrators, staff, and teachers?

**Principal, staff, and teacher support is critical to achieve Zero Waste.** Your oversight and participation will set the tone for the whole school.

More supervision and structure might be required in the cafeteria initially until sorting waste, recyclables, and organics becomes routine.

Take advantage of free resources and support! Schedule a recycling PD for faculty and staff, and encourage everyone to participate.

**Teachers** must follow standardized 3 bin setups in classrooms and provide oversight on student recycling.

### What free resources are available to my school?

- Classroom bins.
- Sorting stations for offices, common areas, and teachers lounges (as needed).
- Ample signs, posters, and decals for all bins.
- Assembly programs and in-class activities for students from Recycling Champions.
- Curriculum and activity development assistance.

Professional development for ALL adult staff.

### Will there be a change to our DSNY collection?

**NO!** Your school's collection service will not change.

- **Organics** collections will continue to be Monday - Friday. Organics collection removes all food and plate waste daily. Please ensure proper sorting of food, food-soiled paper, and compostable plates into brown organics bins.
- **Paper & Cardboard** collections will continue to be Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.
- **Metal, Glass, Rigid Plastics, and Carton** collections will continue to be Tuesday and Thursday.
- **Trash** collection (2 or 3 times a week depending on borough) will not change with the start of the Zero Waste Schools Initiative. Proper and consistent sorting of waste will be integral to program success while also having the benefit of minimizing trash storage issues.

**Trash and recyclables CANNOT be stored on curbs. Items must be set out only on your school building's designated collection days.**

**What happens if the recycling, compost, and trash are not properly sorted?**

If trash is not separated from recycling and/or organic material per City law, your regular DSNY services will be compromised. Services will run more smoothly when source separation of recycling, organics, and trash is happening throughout the inside and outside of school buildings at all times. Consult with your Sustainability Coordinator and DOE Zero Waste Coordinator to troubleshoot contamination issues.

**Do I have to use the containers and signs provided by DOE/DSNY?**

**Yes!** Uniformity across all Zero Waste Schools will establish consistency and familiarity for students as they move up from elementary to middle school to high school.



**What is required of after-school programs using the cafeteria & serving food?**

After-school programs must comply with recycling laws and composting rules. A lack of cooperation with program regulations leads to inconsistent messaging to students and staff, thereby increasing confusion overall.

**What is the role of our school's Sustainability Coordinator?**

- Submit mandatory annual sustainability plans.
- Monitor participation and troubleshoot with DOE Zero Waste Coordinators and the Custodian Engineer.

Sustainability Coordinators should be encouraged to:

- Partner with outreach staff to schedule assemblies, PDs, and teacher outreach.
- Start and/or oversee a student green team to get students engaged in recycling.

**What is the role of our Custodian Engineer?**

- Distribute, label, and set up the free bins provided to your school by the DOE.
- Custodial staff should maintain the bin setups required to dispose of trash, recycling, and organics daily.
- Instruct and train crews to maintain waste separation during evening collection and to place trash, recycling, and organics on the curb in separate piles according to DSNY schedule.

**It is the responsibility of students and staff to sort trash, recyclables, and organics into the correct bins.**

**What is the role of SchoolFood?**

- Monitor the sorting stations in cafeterias for fullness and switch out bags or organics bins as needed.
- Recycle kitchen packaging and collect food scraps for organics collection.
- If your school participates in the Breakfast in the Classroom program, SchoolFood staff has been directed to pick up trash from classrooms and sort recycling, organic waste, and trash in the kitchen to maintain compliance with these mandated programs.

**How long will this program last?**

The Zero Waste School Initiative will last for five years. During this time your school will receive targeted outreach and material support to help you develop strong, sustainable habits.

**Contact:**

[ZeroWasteSchools@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:ZeroWasteSchools@schools.nyc.gov) for more information about assistance and free education programming.

