Zero Waste Schools

FAQs for Teachers

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.

What does this mean for teachers?

Teacher support is critical to the success of the Zero Waste Schools Initiative. To make this program successful, you should:

- Use the provided 3-bin classroom setup to allow students to sort trash, mixed paper, and metal, plastic, and cartons.
- Establish a classroom recycling rule and model good recycling habits.

Additionally, you can bring recycling into your curriculum and encourage students to join your school's green team. Ask your school Sustainability Coordinator for other ways to help your school go Zero Waste.

What should my classroom setup look like?

- 3-bin setup should include:
  - 1 black trash bin.
  - 1 blue metal/glass/plastic/cartons bin.
  - 1 green paper bin.
- Recycling bins next to every trash bin.
- Bins should be together and in the same place every day.
- Decals and posters should be placed on and above bins.

What free resources are available?

- 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.
- Curriculum and activity development assistance.
- Professional development for teachers.

What about Breakfast in the Classroom?

If your school participates in the Breakfast in the Classroom program, SchoolFood staff has been directed to pick up waste from classrooms and sort recycling, organic waste, and trash in the kitchen to maintain compliance with these mandated programs.

Students and staff are responsible for sorting all other waste, recyclables, and organics.

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. Repetition → Reinforcement → Routine
What is the role of my school's Sustainability Coordinator?	➢ Submit mandatory annual sustainability plan. ➢ Monitor participation and troubleshoot with DOE Zero Waste Coordinators and the Custodian Engineer. Sustainability Coordinators are 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 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 Custodian Engineer to troubleshoot contamination issues.
What can I do to help my school reach Zero Waste?	➢ Consistently model waste sorting in your classroom. ➢ Communicate to your students that recycling is a classroom expectation, and an important part of your school's culture. ➢ Be sure your classroom recycling bins are consistently set up, labeled, and in a convenient location. Seek help from your Sustainability Coordinator, DOE Zero Waste Coordinator, and Recycling Champions Coordinators when needed.

Contact:
ZeroWasteSchools@schools.nyc.gov for more information about assistance and free education programming.