

News | [David Rosenfeld](#) | April 24, 2013 4:54 pm

Grades of Green awards area schools for reducing trash



Lunchtime helpers at Lunada Bay Elementary School celebrate their recent victory in Grades of Greens' Trash Reduction Challenge. Photo by David Rosenfeld

When fifth grader Peter Fullerton goes to throw his trash away from lunch each day at Lunada Bay Elementary School, he doesn't just toss it all into a single garbage can.

He separates out recycled material and food waste then stacks a reusable tray. And if Fullerton forgets the routine he has each of his classmates to remind him how it's done.

"It feels like we're helping the environment a lot more," he said.

Lunada Bay Elementary sits on a beautiful spot in Palos Verdes Estates overlooking the ocean so it was only fitting that the school won a grand prize award on Earth Day by the non-profit Grades of Green. The group hosted the competition to reduce landfill garbage called Trash-Free Lunch Challenge among LA County schools based on a grant from the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County. Though it was offered to 77 schools, just 17 participated.

Still, it was an incredible achievement by students who collectively reduced landfill waste by 87 percent, said Lisa Coppedge, program director.

At Lunada Bay the cafeteria went from eight bags of trash per day down to two. Riviera Elementary School in Torrance, one of two finalists along with Washington Elementary in Redondo Beach, cut landfill trash from 15 bags down to just two. A panel of judges selected Lunada Bay in part because the initiative was taken by the students themselves.

"This is a great example of kids caring about the environment," Coppedge said. "If all schools in the country did this we would divert tens of millions of bags of trash and actually make a big dent toward the possibility of a landfill free society."

During the course of the program Grades of Green volunteers and its small staff completed 24 school assemblies and educated more than 8,000 students on the importance of reducing waste and starting good habits that organizers hope will carry on into adulthood.

"The goal is to make it a fun, hands-on experience," Coppedge said.

The group also encourages students to pack trash free lunches, to walk to school as much as possible and to use green cleaning supplies. Coppedge said it really requires the cooperation of students, teachers and parents along with the lunch and janitorial service staff.

"All the award winners have those secret ingredients," Coppedge said.

Lunada Bay principal Nancy Parsons, who's serving in her first year as principal here, said she's extremely proud of the students.

"We have this beautiful school in this beautiful location. I think sometimes they take it for granted," Parsons said. "This helps them understand we have to take care of things that are this beautiful and keep our whole planet like this."

Melissa Bailey, an organizer with Grades of Green said people don't realize how many animals are dying or severely endangered because of plastic molecules in the ocean.

“There are six times as many plastic molecules in the ocean versus zooplankton,” Bailey said. “Animals are eating plastic in the ocean thinking its food and it fills up their stomachs and doesn't pass through. It's a big problem.”

As part of the competition, Grades of Green awarded Lunada Bay a \$1,000 grant, along with \$750 grants to Washington and Riviera. Additional sponsors included Chevron and LA Car Guy.

For more on Grades of Green and its suggestions to bring trash reduction strategies to your school visit GradesofGreen.org.