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Schools accept Trash Free Lunch Challenge to reduce lunchtime waste

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McGaugh School representatives at Trash Free Lunch Challenge training. Photo courtesy of Grades of Green.

When it comes to lunchtime trash, less is definitely more. That's the lesson environmental education nonprofit Grades of Green wants to teach students as the nonprofit kicks off its sixth annual Trash Free Lunch Challenge (TFLC).

Students from participating schools will learn how to eliminate waste by packing trash-free lunches (such as lunch containers, reusable water bottles and utensils, and cloth napkins). All students, including those who buy lunch, will also learn how to sort lunchtime waste for recycling and composting.

Through a combination of sorting waste and bringing reusable lunch containers, TFLC schools reduce an average of 72 percent of lunchtime waste; winning schools recycle or reduce over 92 percent of trash. In total, 90 schools have diverted 180,000 bags of trash from the landfill since the Challenge began 6 years ago. This year, Challenge participants are on track to reduce at least 200,000 bags!

Another exciting addition to this year's TFLC is its expansion into a much larger geographic footprint, including schools in the cities of Santa Clarita, Malibu, Encino and Monrovia. In 2016-17, TFLC will also have the most diverse group of schools from 15 different cities throughout Los Angeles County.

While these metrics speak to the program's success in helping schools protect our environment and divert waste, the real results are the environmental values students take home.

"The goal of the Trash Free Lunch Challenge is not only to reduce waste but also to teach children how to reuse, recycle and compost. Educating students through programs such as these furthers our mission of converting waste into resources in the communities we serve," said Grace Hyde, Chief Engineer and General Manager with Los Angeles County Sanitation District.

"Grades of Green's goal with our Trash Free Lunch Challenge is to help participating schools start lasting green programs to instill environmental and waste reduction habits that will stay with students for a lifetime," said Allie Bussjaeger, Senior Program Manager at Grades of Green. "We are changing the course of the future by making environmental protection second nature in young minds today."

WHAT IS GRADES OF GREEN'S TRASH FREE LUNCH CHALLENGE?

Grades of Green's Trash Free Lunch Challenge is a yearlong competition where Southern California schools challenge each other to see which school can reduce the most lunchtime waste. Grades of Green teaches students in these schools to reduce trash by bringing reusable lunch containers and using lunchtime waste sorting stations. This ultimately forms habits that will protect the environment for years to come.

Through fun, educational assemblies, personalized eco-starter kits, waste reduction plans, and Grades of Green Staff available to personally guide each school, Grades of Green helps create an environment where every school can be a winner! A panel of environmental experts will evaluate the implementation and success of the three finalists' trash reduction programs. The winning schools (one elementary and one middle school) will receive a Grand Prize of a \$1,000 education grant. The four finalist schools will receive \$750. Click [here](http://www.gradesofgreen.org/trash-free-lunch-challenge/) (<http://www.gradesofgreen.org/trash-free-lunch-challenge/>) to learn more about the Challenge.

HOW CAN MY SCHOOL GET INVOLVED?

While this year's Trash Free Lunch Challenge is underway, any school can begin Grades of Green's Trash Free Lunch Activity, as well as more than 40 other student focused eco-minded Activities, at any time. Complete instructions and materials are available at no cost to schools at www.gradesofgreen.org (<http://www.gradesofgreen.org>).

THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

Sponsors of the Trash Free Lunch Challenge include: the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, the City of Santa Monica, Northrop Grumman, UKonserve, and the Johnson Ohana Charitable Foundation.

This article was released by Grades of Green (<http://www.gradesofgreen.org>).

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