

North Scituate Elementary School Spotlight



Introduction

The students, staff, and community surrounding North Scituate Elementary School in Scituate, RI are dedicated to reducing waste and fostering environmental stewardship in students at an early age. The Scituate Sustainability Initiative Committee has been building on strong leadership at the school to ensure successful long-term adoption of programs. They intend to demonstrate to the town and larger community that diverting food scraps from disposal is easy and beneficial in so many ways. The committee sought CET's assistance with providing technical support at no cost to the school. The efforts of North Scituate Elementary School, supported by the Scituate Sustainability Initiative Committee and CET, exemplify the importance of teaching students at a young age about wasted food prevention and environmental stewardship.



Share Table

UNWANTED FOOD

Unopened, pre-packaged food and dairy,
whole fruits with a peel





The school is working towards using clear or blue bags for the recycling bin so students and staff can more easily keep the recycling separate from trash.

Prior to CET's visit, North Scituate Elementary School had several excellent initiatives in place to reduce waste, including a Share Table, a cafeteria sorting station with milk carton recycling, and a process for diverting liquids from disposal. At the end of each lunch period, students go table by table to the sorting station to pour out milk, separate their recyclables, and empty the remaining waste off their reusable trays before leaving them at the dish return. Custodial staff or another adult are always in the lunchroom at the sorting station, ready to assist students with proper sorting. Students can leave their unwanted food items on a Share Table. This allows these wholesome foods to be redistributed to other students in want or need—the food is usually eaten during the same days' lunches, and any remaining items are brought to the school nurse to give to kids who may still be hungry or who need a snack. Another crucial wasted food prevention tactic is employed each morning when the students are surveyed on what they would like to eat for lunch. With this data, the lunchroom staff know how much food to make, drastically reducing surplus food.

In addition to wasted food reduction methods, the school implements reduction initiatives for other types of waste. For example, they use durable reusable trays in the cafeteria, reducing waste from single-use disposable trays. The school also reduces single-use plastic packaging waste by serving cut fruit from a large serving container instead of using disposable, individual-size bowls, and by having condiments available from dispensers instead of individual packets. Teachers and students worked together to create educational waste bin signage posted in the cafeteria.



Teaming Up With CET

Because of the initiatives already in place, CET offered only minor adjustments to the school's current programs and focused on their main goal of connecting with a service provider for their food scraps.

Small adjustments included improving the setup order of waste collection bins and adding waste signage to the trash bins. Although a sorting station setup can be adjusted to fit the individual needs of the school, following a setup like the one shown in the [Stop Waste graphic](#) below ensures all materials are separated into their appropriate bins. The adjustments made have helped the school reduce the minor contamination from black, single-use disposable utensils they were experiencing in the single-stream recycling collection. North Scituate found it helpful to have the bins in a row compared to the setup prior where the trash bin was closer to the tray return and away from the recycling bin.

Meal Sorting Station Guide
For Cafeteria and Outdoor Meals

1 Food Share*
Why Here? Drop off heaviest items first to prevent spills
Best Practices:

- Clean bins maintain food safety & appeal
- Only items from the school meal program
- Keep like items together

2 Liquids
Why Here? Pour liquids as they are not allowed in the recycle bin
Best Practices:

- Don't empty juice containers as they take longer to empty
- Raise the bucket with a crate to prevent spills

3 Recycle Bin
Why Here? Milk cartons are captured immediately after liquids
*check with your handler to know if milk cartons are recyclable
Best Practices:

- Materials should be as empty and dry as possible

4 Landfill Bin
Why Here? Capture contaminants before the compost bin
Best Practices:

- Capture landfill items at student tables throughout lunch
- Squishy, flimsy plastic goes in the landfill bin

5 Compost Bin
Why Here? Capture compostables before stacking trays
Best Practices:

- Tap trays against the inside of the bin to release stuck on food
- No plastic wrapped food allowed

6 Stack Trays
Why Here? Neatly stack trays to save space in the compost bin
Best Practices:

- Stage a small stack of trays to model nesting
- Stack trays like a puzzle and push down on the stack of trays

General Tips & Best Practices:

- Clear signage above the opening of the bins prompts proper sorting behavior
- Keep space for students to access the sorting station on both sides
- Placement of sorting station should flow with tray stacking ending nearest the exit
- Wipe down the sorting station every day

STOP WASTE
Version 1.3

To support the school's goal of connecting with a service provider for their food scraps, CET researched options for food scrap processing that were both local and statewide. CET offered guidance and support through decision-making processes and gathered quotes for potential options. Once a solution was identified, CET connected the school with a local option: a local recycler

with pigs near the school where their food scraps would become animal feed. North Scituate Elementary School felt strongly that if students knew their lunch scraps would feed animals, it would help emphasize the need for a clean stream with no contamination. The ability to connect a target audience with strong emotional motivators is essential for driving behavior change that really sticks.

As of Spring 2024, North Scituate Elementary School has already had 6 pick-ups of scraps sent to the pig farm. With two 36-gallon carts picked up once a week, the school will divert around four tons of wasted food from landfills per year, while providing twenty percent of the animals' diet.



Looking Forward

For next steps and goals, North Scituate Elementary School intends to start weighing its buckets of food scraps to gather more detailed data, and the Scituate Sustainability Initiative Committee aims to implement similar programs in other schools in the community.

By employing effective behavior change strategies and waste diversion initiatives, such as sorting stations, share tables, and data-driven lunch planning, North Scituate Elementary School has significantly reduced its environmental footprint while fostering a culture of responsibility and awareness among its students and staff. They hope these students will look for these waste reduction programs as they move up through the school system.

Through collaboration with CET, the school has enhanced their existing programs and successfully connected with a local service provider for food scraps. As North Scituate Elementary School continues to lead by example, utilizing emotional motivators for student behavior change and sharing their successes, they plan to inspire other schools to follow suit, creating a ripple effect of positive change in waste prevention efforts throughout the community.

Check out the [North Scituate Elementary School's newsletter](#).

If your school, business, or institution would like to implement waste reduction programs, contact the CET hotline for assistance at (888) 813-8552, cetonline.org, or wastedfood@cetonline.org.

