



Student-led Recycling Initiative

Program Summary

For recycling to function correctly, we need formalized education at all ages about all aspects of recycling, as well as investment in doing it correctly. Unfortunately, local recycling rules can be inconsistent, confusing, and something most of our partner schools cannot afford. However, local schools request our recycling lessons more than any other topic. We taught 550 students about recycling in 2019 alone. There is an evident need for recycling education and access to schoolwide recycling, as education without action is futile.

About the Program

Our program aims to craft a sustainable culture at schools through active student engagement, environmental learning experiences, and recycling, to support the cultivation of young and empowered environmental stewards. This program was inspired by our experience working G.W. Carver High School students, helping them launch school-wide paper recycling. Our joint efforts led to Carver placing first for highschools in the 2019 USGBC Green School Challenge. Recognizing both the impact of implementing school-wide recycling and the power of it being student-led, we are now replicating the program in more local schools.

Program Goals

1. Develop a Sustainable Green School Culture Through a Green Team

Our experience shows that students and school administrators need to be given ownership of a recycling project if it is to become sustainable over time. *Green Teams* are made of one on-site teacher or administrator and at least two students from each grade per school. This design is meant to sustain and gain environmental momentum in subsequent years, with older students mentoring the younger ones. The Green Project coaches each *Green Team* through weekly mentorship for the first year of the program, and on a regular, but less frequent, basis thereafter. Students learn the ins and outs of recycling, environmental communication, and campaign building. *Green Teams* become responsible for disseminating recycling information to their school community, monitoring the recycling bins for contamination, as well as planning and organizing environmental contests and celebrations.

2. Provide Environmental Learning Experiences

The key to successful recycling is to ensure that all students receive the same consistent messaging about what can and cannot go in the recycling bin at school, with a thorough understanding of why the rules are in place. Along with mentoring the *Green Team*, the Green Project offers school-wide recycling lessons through assemblies and/or classroom lessons. We specify this education based on the school's recycling provider and also detail how to recycle correctly in Orleans Parish (i.e., via at-home curbside recycling) to reduce contamination rates. With this streamlined education, students are able to hold each other accountable and keep contamination low.

3. Develop and Support School Wide Recycling

The Green Project assists school administration in navigating available recycling companies to find one that makes sense for the school's location and budget. If a school is unable to afford the services of a recycling company, we help in finding other ways to reduce waste at the school. This might include reducing paper use and implementing a scrap paper policy, hosting a bead collection contest, or incentivizing students to bring reusable water bottles. It may also include shifting focus to help students get recycling bins at their own homes to reduce landfill waste while also leading their neighborhood community in recycling efforts.

Additional Support: *The Green Project maintains a small budget to help provide schools with uniform recycling bins, signage, design services, lamination, and transportation to the Green Project for one Green Team field trip per school.*