



It has been estimated that, on average, a single school-age child generates 67 pounds of lunchtime waste per school year, or 18,760 pounds of lunch waste for one average-size elementary school. Why use educational dollars to pay for trash disposal? Every single piece of packaging or excess food that we eliminate from the waste stream makes a difference. Please do your part to help!

Waste-Free Lunch Pack	Disposable Lunch Avoid
·Lunch in reusable containers	·Lunch packed in plastic bags, foil, wax paper
·Drink in a thermos or reusable bottle	·Prepackaged lunches
·A cloth napkin	·Prepackaged single-serve items
·A reusable lunch box or bag	·Disposable drink boxes or pouches
·Washable tableware	·Disposable tableware

Everybody Needs to be “On Board”

A waste-free lunch program is a process of educating students, school staff and parents. The first step is to weigh or measure the garbage on any regular school day. The result, in pounds or bags, will then be used to demonstrate that by packing waste-free lunches, less waste will be generated. Post results on a common-area bulletin board on an on-going basis.

The next step is to explain to everyone how all the wrappings of a sack lunch add up and end up in a landfill, as well as food that is brought to school and not eaten. Have an all-school assembly to highlight the criteria of a waste-free lunch. Emphasize that the reusable containers do not have to be bought at a store. Any plastic food container with a lid will work. Show examples of the “Do’s” and “Don’ts” for reinforcement.

Encourage students to communicate with their parents what they like to eat for lunch. A student with missing teeth is going to have trouble eating an apple that is not cut up. Some children only eat a half of a sandwich, while others need two. Also, food that is not eaten during lunch should go back in the reusable lunch bag to be eaten later, perhaps as an afterschool snack.



Visit wastefreelunches.org for the following information:

- Waste Audits
- Sample Parent Letter
- Cost Comparisons
- Display Ideas
- Lunch-Time Activities
- Educating Your Family
- Success Stories

Other Suggestions

Sort Unopened Food and Drinks – have students place their unopened/uneaten food and beverages on a tray instead of putting in the garbage. If possible, establish a “sharing table” where students can take from the tray, or communicate with the local food pantry to see what items can be donated and establish a schedule for pick-up. Check out foodbus.org and foodrescue.net.

Compost – set up an indoor worm composting bin or an outdoor composting bin. Organic food scraps can be used to feed the worms, and from waste comes a nutrient-rich soil. Small branches, paper and landscape waste can be put in the outdoor bin. Please be mindful of any municipal restrictions.

Compare Products – Have the students do a cost analysis of single-serve drink boxes vs the same product in a powder form that gets mixed with water, or a favorite snack packaged individually vs a larger bag of the same product. How much of a cost or savings does buying in individually-wrapped products/vs bulk come out to over a week, month, school year? After the research is complete, chart and graph your findings. Post your findings in a newsletter or on a bulletin board.

Resources:

Green Lunchroom Challenge resources – <https://publish.illinois.edu/green-lunchroom/>

Smarter Lunchrooms - <https://www.smarterlunchrooms.org>

For more information about SWANCC’s educational programs and special collections, visit swancc.org or call (847) 724-9205.