

Food Loss Prevention Options for Grade Schools

Below is a list of ideas and activities that grade schools may consider implementing to help prevent food loss and waste. Contact your local EPA representative for log sheets, signs, and other tools.

- Perform a food waste audit.** See what's being thrown out and why.
 - Get the students involved. Be there at the dish return line with a few volunteers, buckets, a log sheet and a weight scale. Record what and how much is being thrown out and why. Be sure to ask students for reasons why they didn't finish their food.
 - In the kitchen, have only one food waste trash can and provide each staff member a small container to fill with food waste at their station. Before they empty their container, have staff weigh it and record the amount, type and reason the waste is being discarded on a log sheet located near the trash can.
 - *Audit Tip: Volunteering can be part of the core curriculum or count toward community service hours for many student organizations.*
- Set up a share table.** Check with your local health department and school board to find out if donating and sharing is allowed. If so, set up a share table, a place students can return whole items that they choose not to eat so that they are available for others who may want additional helpings.
- Employ "Offer versus Serve."** Offer versus Serve is a provision in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program and their School Breakfast Program that allows students to decline some of the food offered that they do not intend to eat to help reduce food waste.
- Schedule recess before lunch.** This strategy shows a reduction of plate waste and an increase in food and nutrient consumption.
- Provide children another choice of beverage** in the food service line that is low cost for the school (e.g., water).
- Extend lunch periods from 20 to 30 minutes** to reduce plate waste by nearly one-third.
- Minimize waste from mandatory fruit and vegetable servings.** Many schools are required to offer or serve a fruit/vegetable serving to students. Below are tips to reduce waste associated with this requirement:
 - **Slice the fruit:** Cutting fruit into bite-sized pieces is easier to eat and encourages students to eat what is on their trays.
 - **Give fruits and vegetables catchy names that appeal to children:** Younger kids like fun names like "X-ray Vision Carrots" and "Super Strength Spinach" while older children prefer more descriptive names like "Succulent Summer Corn" and "Crisp Celery and Carrots."
 - **Put healthy foods within reach:** Moving salad bars and fruit closer to students' reach increases both sales and consumption.

