



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 www.swancc.org and <https://sevendgenerationsahead.org/zero-waste/> 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 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. Learn more at swancc.org/resources/composting.

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:

Illinois Food Scrap Coalition – illinoiscomposts.org

U.S. EPA - <https://www.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-and-reusing-basics>

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

Sample Letter to Parents About Participating in a Waste-Free Lunch Day



(Insert Date)

Dear Parents:

(Insert School Name) is holding a *Waste-Free Lunch Day* on (Insert Day). This means that if your child brings a lunch from home, he/she is being asked to bring all food/beverage in reusable, washable containers in a reusable bag. The goal is to have little to no packaging.

As a nation, 40% of what is grown, raised and produced collectively is wasted each year at a cost of \$165 billion dollars (*American Wasteland*, by Jonathan Bloom). The US Environmental Protection Agency and the US Department of Agriculture have a goal to reduce food waste 50% by 2030 (epa.gov).

In planning a waste-free lunch, it is important to communicate with your child. Be sure to pack food items that he/she likes and to encourage him/her to eat what they bring. Be mindful to cut up large items if your child is young or missing teeth, or only to pack a ½ sandwich if a whole one is too much for younger tummies. Include an ice pack if food requires refrigeration.

Include:

- Sandwich in a reusable container
- Fruit & snacks in reusable containers
- Cloth napkin
- Beverage in thermos or recyclable container
- Reusable stainless steel straw if needed
- Reusable utensils (fork, spoon, etc.)

Don't Include:

- Individually wrapped items
- Plastic wrap or baggies
- Paper napkin
- Single-serve bottled water
- Plastic straw
- Disposable plastic utensils

Pack lunch the night before and encourage your child to bring home uneaten items, if able, and reuse plastic baggies whenever possible, if must use. **Make each day a waste-free day!**

Please contact (insert your name and email address) if you have any questions. For more information regarding the benefits of waste-free lunch days, visit <https://www.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-and-reusing-basics>.

Thank you for your support!

(Name of administrator or teacher - title)