

Zero Waste Action Plan:

Draft Section Targeting School Waste in Eureka

This section looks at how the City can best serve, support, and guide local schools to reduce their waste. Public schools and districts are a distinct government entity and are not subject to the City of Eureka's waste management requirements unlike residents and businesses. We also recognize that schools are educating and uplifting future generations during a vital time of youth development. Studies show that introducing and teaching environmental topics and waste reduction behaviors earlier in development, can foster environmental stewardship in youth, which is then shared with their family and community.

Background Information Relevant to Local Schools and School Waste:

- The City of Eureka is required to provide education and collect data about school's waste diversion efforts and report annually through the Electronic Annual Report (EAR) which is a requirement by the State Agency, CalRecycle. The City of Eureka is not an enforcement body.
- Previous state mandates have laid out requirements for schools (AB 827, AB341, AB1826) but Senate Bill 1383 is the most recent and overarching - Effective on January 1, 2022, requires organic waste diversion & sets parameters for edible food recovery, this includes organic waste collection & food donation requirements for schools. SB1383 also requires recycling and organics recycling next to any trash bin. Note: SB 1383 implementation and compliance is not available in Eureka due to an extension approval from the state.
- The HWMA Waste Characterization Study is materials and sector based without a specification for schools, however we can apply Eureka's overall waste stream data to schools. According to the most recent study, recoverable paper, other recoverables, and compostable/potentially compostable materials make up 39% of Eureka's waste stream. As for composition by material class, organics make up 26%. In relation to schools for example, this could be partially eaten food/food scraps and used napkins and/or paper towels.
- HWMA currently contracts Eco Heroes and 4 R Planet, which are youth-oriented waste reduction education programs to visit local schools annually, which includes Eureka.

Research and Information Gathering Process About Eureka School Waste and Reduction Strategies

State and National Research

Staff have researched waste management in schools at the state and national level to understand government mandates, trends in innovation and technology, best practices, strategies, effective programming and more.

- CalRecycle
- US Department of Agriculture
- California Department of Food and Agriculture (Farm to School Program)
- Environmental Protection Agency
- The California Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI)
- Northern California Recycling Association (Student Green Team Initiative)

Tours of Local Schools

City staff went on local tours of schools and associated facilities in Eureka to understand how they currently manage and divert the waste generated on campus. This research is paramount to highlight what's already being done and see where there is room for improvement. Many of the notable findings are direct results of our one-on-one interviews and tours.

- St. Bernard's Academy – Principal, Paul Shanahan & Co-Principal, Catherine Scott
- Alice Birney Elementary School – Principal, Kristin Sobilo
- Eureka City Schools Central Kitchen - Food Services Director, Kevin Ralston

Local Meetings with Schools and Affiliated Organizations:

- Humboldt County Office of Education, Nutrition Services - Linda Prescott & Erin Derden-Little
- Eureka City Schools, Transportation, Operations and Risk Management – Dan Pires
- CalRecycle – Spencer Fine & Marshalle Graham
- Zero Waste Humboldt - Maggie Gainer
- 4 R Planet, Waste Reduction Education Specialist - Allison Poklemba
- The EcoHero Show, Waste Reduction Education Liaison - Monique Figueiredo

Notable Findings from Research and Information Gathering

Notable findings highlight the most important information found through the research process which inform the recommended action items.

Nutrition and Food

- Local school facilities providing youth nutrition services have some restrictions over their meal planning and product purchasing due to specific state regulations and subsidies. This includes portion size, meal components, and nutritional value.
- Local school agencies seek grant funding which can help purchase local produce and provide farm-to-school meals and accompanied education, however, grant funding consistency can be unstable.
- Beginning in School Year (SY) 2022–23, California will become the first state to implement a statewide Universal Meals Program for all school children. California's Universal Meals Program is designed to build on the foundations of the federal National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP).

Education

- The State of California has Common Core State Standards. The curriculum frameworks provide guidance for implementing the content standards adopted by the State Board of Education, however, teachers can develop their own curriculum with the opportunity to include environmental concepts if they choose. For example, if teaching math, they could teach the equations utilizing pounds of garbage or recycling as the context.

- Waste characterization studies are designed to provide baseline data of the waste stream, which helps to identify diversion programs and needs, and with schools can also benefit students as an educational opportunity.
- Waste diversion education, outreach, and implementation programs can be inconsistent due to the reliance of grant funding and outside sources for their existence. Working to gain this type of funding and developing partnerships with local grant-funded entities can be a perpetual and arduous process with unknown results hindering long-term planning.

Recycling/Reuse Infrastructure

- New programs that will further divert school waste will likely involve a financial investment at first, however programs with successful implementation typically see a return on investment due to lower overall waste costs.
- Liquid in the waste stream should be addressed due to spoilage and its significant increase to the overall weight of materials going to the landfill. For example, properly disposing of liquids in a separate process prior to the beverage container being thrown away.
- Many local schools do not prepare food onsite therefore most meals are in disposable containers and using disposable cutlery.
- SB1383 will be mandating that all schools offer recycling and organics bins next to trash bins, and that all excess edible food is donated if a school has a food preparation facility onsite.

Suggest Action Items

Short Term (1-2 Years)

- Work with schools as they implement SB1383 requirements including providing, educating, and monitoring a two-bin waste disposal system (recycling and garbage), and a three-bin system when organics processing becomes available.
- Build relationships with schools to regularly be part of assemblies, fairs, and special events to provide waste diversion and environmental education outreach to the youth and educators.
- Explore partnerships to apply for grants that incentivize waste reduction programs at schools.

Mid-Term (3-5 Years)

- Develop local compost education programs in the area to assist schools with on-site compost programs.
- Provide recognition for schools through a Green School or Zero Waste School program to highlight schools excelling in waste reduction. Connect schools to national recognition/cert programs.
- Pursue partnering with schools to enhance and expand waste reduction topics into curriculum.
- Review the potential to phase out disposable cutlery and other utensils to work towards a goal of all reusable dishware.
- Review the potential to support liquid disposal options to remove this material from the waste stream.

- Expand waste reduction education resources for schools such as bringing the Eco Hero show more frequently to Eureka schools.
- Encourage the Eureka City Schools Governance Board to adopt a ZWAP resolution to lead to a Zero Waste Action Plan

Long Term (5-10 Years)

- Explore best options to support Waste Characterization Studies for school sites and consider including schools as a sector in the next HWMA study, while considering including students in the process.
- Explore the feasibility and funding opportunities to provide grants to school, non-profits, and NGOs to assist schools to implement innovative reduction, reuse, recycling, and compost programs.
- Advocate for minimized packing in universal meals program.