



ECASD Waste Audit Report 2023-2024

Eau Claire County Recycling and Sustainability

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Common Questions About Waste Audits

What is a Waste Audit?

Waste audits are an effective method for recording and monitoring the waste trends in your school. As a group you are in charge of sorting, measuring, and recording all the data and methods which you are using to conduct your waste audit. They are a good way to find prevention and reduction opportunities for your school. Limiting the amount of waste will not only help the environment by limiting the amount of food waste going into landfills which creates greenhouse gas emissions but, can help save money for your school by not buying unnecessary food items which are being wasted.

How were the Waste Audits Conducted in ECASD Schools?

In ECASD schools, waste audits were conducted according to the schools already implemented waste management structure with the addition of a compost bin. The students would optimally presort the waste on their trays into landfill and compost. There was little material which was recyclable and was commonly from children who had cold lunch (i.e. soda cans, plastic drink bottles, etc.). They would be excused from lunch and dump milk and their sorted waste into the correct bins. After discarding all their waste, and using reusable trays, the kids would put their trays on the counter or cart and line up for class.

Where is the Compost Going?

After the compost is sorted by the students, it is bagged in compostable bags and taken out like normal trash and recyclables. It is then picked up by Earthbound Environmental Solutions, a local area trash hauler who also collects compost.



FIGURE 1. MAP SHOWING THE 6 SCHOOLS WHERE THE WASTE AUDITS WERE CONDUCTED AND THE PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH.

Locations and Methods

Waste audits were conducted in 6 Eau Claire Area Schools. Each school received a grant allowing them to establish a composting program. The schools were provided with the necessary materials to begin composting such as bags and bins to place compost after being discarded. The compost is hauled like normal waste by Earthbound Environmental. By limiting the amount of food waste going into the landfill, the school would be cutting costs while also reducing their overall carbon footprint.

For each school, Eau Claire County (ECC) Staff and JONAH Environmental Task Force volunteers would help faculty and staff by educating students on how the compost program functioned and what they were doing to help limit carbon emissions during their normal lunch period. For one academic week, ECC staff and volunteers also weighted bags of waste to compare the amount of waste in each stream. At the end of the week, the numbers were added to show the weights in each waste stream.

Free & Reduced Lunch Percentage

on average

41.11%

of students are part of free and reduced lunch between the 5 schools with statistics.

Northwoods: 49.66, Locust Lane Elementary: 51.08, Roosevelt Elementary: 40.42, Sherman: 36.94, Meadowview: 36.39, Robbins: 32.14

FIGURE 2

RESULTS FROM ECASD SCHOOLS WASTE AUDITS



How much waste was generated by 6 ECASD elementary schools during the waste audits. This only includes lunchtime waste.



1932.55 lbs.

of food waste in one week.



96.46 gal.

of liquid waste in one week.



1048.67 lbs

of landfill waste in one week.



145.39 lbs

of kitchen waste in one week.

Representative of only Sherman, Meadowview, and Northwoods elementary schools.

Common items seen in the trash included:

- Plastic Silverware
- Single Use Containers (trays, Styrofoam cups, plastic cups)
- Food Wrappers (Unopened)
- Condiment Packets
- Milk Cartons

In one week, the food composted saved approximately 5.05 tons of greenhouse gasses from being produced by food in the landfill.

THATS EQUIVALENT TO:

1 passenger vehicles driven for one year



Discussion

After completing the waste audits, the schools will need to do a follow-up in the future to check any progress which has been made. That date is yet to be determined but will happen in 2024.

Food waste was the largest stream of waste in the 6 schools. Several comments were made by ECASD staff about the changes to the weight of the landfill bags once composting became an option. The bags used for composting are also compostable and require no additional work to dispose of.

The waste audits also revealed that the students are interested in composting. Going around the lunchroom, ECC staff engaged with the students from K-5th grade during their lunch period and discussed composting with them. The students were interested in how it worked and what it was used for.

The students also understood that composting was now the norm for food waste after discussions with their teachers and staff and ECC staff and volunteers.

Many students also offered to help their friends in the line, showing them where their garbage went. Some schools also opted to allow some students to help with the composting process throughout the week. These students were usually in 4th or 5th grade and wanted to learn more about the composting process or asked to stay later or come earlier to lunch with the approval of their teachers.

Within 1 week, the students were able to sort their waste with little to no error when going through the line. Further progress made will be assessed in the future with an additional waste audit. Other strategies to reduce waste going into the compost and landfill could include:

1. Using reusable silverware and trays over single-use Styrofoam or plastics.
2. Restructuring how students eat lunch to limit food waste.
3. Having sustainability specialists give educational talks or activities to students during regular school times.

These three strategies are optional but could drastically increase participation and awareness.

FIGURE 3 KEY FINDINGS From the Waste Audits

Food waste is the largest weight contributor.

Students are interested in composting.

One week was enough to learn and almost perfect sorting in observed schools.

Acknowledgements

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