



KINDERGARTEN & NEW STUDENT ZERO WASTE ORIENTATION

Kindergarten & New Student Orientation is a great time to introduce your school's newest students and their parents to your zero waste and sustainability efforts. Starting at a new school can be both exciting and intimidating, and many students may not have previous experience recycling or composting. Help new students feel comfortable and part of the school community by incorporating some of the ideas in this guide. Orientation is also a perfect time for engaging new parents with zero waste or green team volunteer opportunities. Introducing your school's zero waste program during orientation will set your newest students up for being environmental leaders of the future and making a difference in protecting the health of the planet.



IDEAS FOR ZERO WASTE ORIENTATION:

Recruit current student leaders to help

Invite your current student leaders (perhaps those in an environmental club or student council) to help prepare and present parts of the orientation. Student leaders could:

- Demonstrate the existing waste sorting system
- Facilitate a zero waste game (see ideas below)
- Give tours of the school garden, cafeteria, or other student sustainability initiatives
- Ask engaging questions, so students and parents can share or apply their zero waste knowledge
- Help prepare presentations or printed materials to share with the new students and their parents (younger students will benefit from lots of pictures)

Engage new parents

Orientation is a great opportunity to get parents involved with zero waste initiatives at your school.

Here are some ideas:

Volunteers: If your school needs parent volunteers to help with your zero waste lunchroom, zero waste events, school green team, or school garden, this is a perfect time to recruit and get out a sign-up sheet.

Zero waste pledge: Create a zero waste pledge with zero waste goals for parents and students to commit to throughout the school year. Ask parents to discuss and sign the zero waste pledge with their child. Items on the pledge might include:

- We pledge to avoid purchasing single-use plastic bottles of water.
- We pledge to use reusable containers for school meals.
- We pledge to recycle and compost when possible.
- We pledge to shop for and pack smarter meals to reduce food waste.

Educational information: Provide pamphlets or flyers for families to take home with educational information about zero waste, how to pack zero waste lunches, how your school is taking part in sustainability initiatives, and more.

Pack a zero waste lunch: Encourage students and parents to pack lunches that promote zero waste by minimizing the number of items that end up in the landfill. Consider setting up a small display of some inexpensive items that might be present in a zero waste lunch.



Remember:

- Use reusable containers, bags, silverware, and ice packs
- Purchase snacks in bulk to sort into reusable containers
- Pack realistic portions
- Take back home any uneaten food

Avoid:

- Non-reusable paper or plastic bags
- Individually-packaged snacks
- Aluminum foil and plastic wrap
- Disposable utensils, ice packs, or drink containers (juice boxes or pouches)
- Plastic straws

Packing a zero waste lunch is not only more environmentally sustainable, it can also save money. Disposable containers and bags must be repurchased regularly, but reusable versions can last years. Moreover, bulk purchasing is almost always cheaper than purchasing individually-packaged food items.

Recommended resources:

- Recycle Smart's [How to Pack a Zero Waste Lunch!](#)
- Illinois Sustainable Technology Center's [Zero Waste Guides](#)
- WasteFreeLunches' [What is a Waste-Free Lunch Program?](#)

Take a tour

Showcase your school's sustainability initiatives with a tour of the cafeteria, classroom, garden, or other efforts (solar panels, rain barrels, green roof, etc). If a tour is not possible, print or display pictures of the places.

Cafeteria: Tour the cafeteria to see the waste sorting stations. Show students and parents the sorting signs and discuss what belongs in each bin. Consider playing a sorting game using real lunch trays, sample waste items, and laminated pictures of food (see more about planning a sorting game below).

Garden: Tour your school garden or other sustainable agriculture projects.
Highlight:

- Its purpose and an overview of what's growing
- How and when it's maintained, and who maintains it
- Who eats the food
- Any relationship to school composting (onsite or commercial)



Play a game

Play one or more of the following hands-on games with the new students to familiarize them and get them excited about your school's zero waste or garden programs.

Lunchroom sorting game: Teach new students how your zero waste lunchroom sorting system works by playing this sorting game using real lunch trays, sample waste items, and laminated pictures of food. This is also a great activity for reteaching returning students at the start of the school year when reviewing general lunchroom procedures and expectations with students.

Set-up and play:

- Ideally, use the actual lunchroom sorting station for this game (with signs attached and real liner bags in place). If the lunchroom is not available, it may be possible to move the sorting station in another location. If the actual sorting station is not available, create a pretend sorting station using a row of chairs, desks, or buckets (with sorting signs attached).

Here is a sample sorting setup that incorporates recycling, composting, and tray stacking:



- Collect typical lunch waste items (milk cartons, straws, sporks, plastic cups, condiment packets, typical meal packaging etc.) and actual lunch trays. The school food service staff may be able to help provide these. Collect typical home lunch items for a home lunch example (juice box, brown paper bag, foil, plastic water bottle, ziploc bag, reusable lunch box, granola bar wrapper, etc).
- Print and laminate photos of typical lunch food items. Click [here](#) for downloadable food images.
- Provide each new student with a sample lunch tray and/or a sample lunch box/bag.
- Encourage the students to pretend they are at lunch and have just finished eating. Guide students to properly sort the materials on their tray into the correct bins as they move through the sorting station. Show students how they can look at the sorting signs for help.



- Consider adding some competition to the activity. Group students into two teams, and time individual students as they sort their sample lunches. Scoring: Record the time it takes each individual student to sort and add 1 for every item incorrectly sorted. The team with the lowest score wins. (The photo at the right shows a sorting competition.)



School garden scavenger hunt: Conduct a garden scavenger hunt that will allow students to explore the garden at their own pace. Students can be divided up into teams or work individually. The student(s) with the most tasks completed can take home a fruit or vegetable from the garden. Examples of scavenger hunt objectives include:



- Find the watering can/hose.
- Find a plant with fruit on it.
- Find a plant with a vegetable on it.
- Find a butterfly or caterpillar.
- Find one plant that has been chewed on by an animal or insect.
- Find one or two items you have never seen before.

Recommended resources:

- Life Lab's [Garden Scavenger Hunts](#)
- Kids Gardening's [Scavenger Hunt in the Garden](#)

Classroom recycling sorting game: Set up sample classroom recycling and trash bins. Give each new student (or pair of students) a collection of typical classroom waste materials for them to practice sorting. What is acceptable for recycling will vary from school to school; be sure to confirm what items are recyclable with your school hauler. Some sample items could include:

Recyclables: notebook paper, construction paper, a piece of cardboard

Landfill/trash: an empty glue stick, facial tissue, pencil shavings, food, food wrappers, plastic bags, dry markers or pens, broken crayons



Document the orientation

Documenting the orientation presentations is a great way to share the materials with teachers and families that are unable to attend the orientation in person and for reuse in future years. Documentation may include photos, audio or video recordings, written "how-to" guides, presentation slides, or other orientation material.