



DECEMBER NEWSLETTER



The Zero Waste Schools newsletter will help you get your school on a path toward generating zero waste through waste prevention, recycling, composting, and food recovery. You'll also find resources that connect zero waste to healthy eating, school gardens, and environmental education and action.

Share the newsletter with friends, colleagues, and students interested in zero waste.

[Sign up for ZWS news](#)

Thank you for your engagement in 2023.
We look forward to bringing zero waste to
many more schools in 2024!



Please consider an end-of-year [donation](#) to SGA to help us continue expanding our Zero Waste Schools initiatives throughout the Chicago metropolitan region. Your donation will help students take climate action each and every day in their own schools.

It's Our Future students at COP28

As part of Seven Generations Ahead's It's Our Future (IOF) program, six Chicago area [students](#) had the privilege of attending COP28 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai, UAE. The students played an active role

at the conference by participating in 5 panel discussions on a diverse array of topics, including climate anxiety, climate literacy, and school lunches as a tool for student empowerment. One student even had the opportunity to share her personal experiences with leaders of U.S. departments and agencies and then join them to brainstorm solutions to some of the world's most pressing issues.



On December 6th all student delegates took part in a livestream event "Youth Voices from COP" which had over 200 attendees from across the globe. Click [HERE](#) to watch the recording and listen to what these youth advocates had to say about their once-in-a-lifetime experience at COP.

Follow It's Our Future on Instagram at [@iofyouth](#).

New Natural Resources Defense Council video: *Food is Made to be Eaten*



The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) has released more information about the food waste epidemic. The NRDC states that up to 40% of the food in circulation is wasted. This means that the resources used to produce that food such as water, time, transportation, and labor are also being wasted.

In addition to such a large amount of food going to waste, there is also a rising number of hungry people. While food redistribution, sometimes referred to as donation, rescue, or recovery, may not address the root causes of food insecurity, it can serve as a valuable means to assist individuals in meeting their food requirements, particularly when excess food is accessible.

Fortunately, the NRDC has partnered with Chef Tom Colicchio to create a [video](#) to explain the importance of limiting food waste, as well as the updated [policies](#) from the U.S. government that support food donation.

Go for less waste this holiday season

Give the planet a gift by getting closer to zero waste this holiday season. Check out these tips:

Planning your gathering: Plan your zero waste holiday event with the help of SGA's [Zero Waste Schools Event Guide](#). The guide features general advice on eliminating waste no matter the event, covering topics such as avoiding single-use foodware like disposable plates, cups, and cutlery, sending leftovers home with guests in reusable containers, and composting food scraps.



Gift wrapping: Choose reusable wrapping materials like cloth napkins, scarves, or cloth bags. Repurposing old maps, newspaper, and brown paper bags are also great options -

plus these materials can be easily decorated and recycled. If you do use wrapping paper, remember that **foil, sparkly paper, ribbons, string, and bows cannot be recycled.**

Gift ideas:

- Give a compost collection service subscription. Find service options at the [Illinois Food Scrap and Composting Coalition](#).
- Give a [Zero Waste To-Go Kit](#) complete with a metal straw, reusable utensils, cloth napkin, reusable container for leftovers, insulated coffee mug or reusable water bottle, and a nice cloth bag to hold it all.
- Donate to a [local food bank](#) in honor of a loved one.
- Gift experiences, not things. Some great ideas include certificates for spa treatments, restaurants, or local performances.
- Did you know that returns from online shopping created 5.8 billion tons of landfill waste in 2020? Avoid shopping online and support local stores instead.

Holiday lights collection



Not sure what to do with your non-working holiday lights? This December, Reduce Waste Chicago will be hosting its third-annual holiday lights collection featuring 10 more drop-off locations than last year. **Drop-off points will be open from Dec. 1 - Jan. 31.**

For a full list of locations and hours, please click [HERE](#). Please note that plastic bags or cardboard packaging will not be accepted.

The City of West Chicago is also running a collection program with 6 drop-off sites through January 19th. For hours and locations, click [HERE](#).

Did you know that you can also mail in your non-working holiday lights? HolidayLEDs offers year-round light recycling services. To find out more and for a full list of acceptable items, click [HERE](#).

International Compost Awareness Week 2024 poster contest winner announced

The 2024 International Compost Awareness Week (ICAW) poster contest winner is Ny Rindra Arison Malalaniaina. Her entry was chosen from hundreds of entries from around the world. Rindra's design reflects next year's ICAW theme: "COMPOST... Nature's Climate Champion!" The artist hopes her poster raises awareness about the importance of compost, its benefits to the earth, and shows solidarity with our planet.

The theme was selected by international partners and aligns with the collective emphasis on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts."

Read more [HERE](#).



Plastic Free Restaurants helps schools transition to reusable foodware



Each year the United States generates 42 million metric tons of plastic waste. Schools are a large contributor to this statistic as single-use plastics are commonplace in lunchrooms across the U.S.

One way to reduce plastic waste in schools is to introduce reusable foodware. The non-profit [Plastic Free Restaurants](#) aims to do just that. The organization's mission is to help institutions eliminate single-use plastic by subsidizing the cost of transitioning to reusable foodware. Since 2020 they have eliminated 9.2 million single-use plastic items from a combination of schools and restaurants.

Plastic Free Restaurant's Executive Director discusses three takeaways from running the non-profit in a recent piece published by [Upstream Solutions](#). To read more about the fight to remove single-use plastics from lunchrooms and restaurants, click [HERE](#).

Illinois Green Ribbon Schools

The [Illinois Green Ribbon Schools Application](#) is currently accepting submissions! This program acknowledges schools with active initiatives and unwavering dedication to fostering sustainability awareness and education. In collaboration with the [Illinois Board of Higher Education](#), Illinois Green Alliance invites applications from schools across the state. Participating in this program provides an excellent opportunity to highlight your school's green initiatives. Schools that achieve top scores will have the chance to be nominated for the U.S. Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools program at the national level.



Submit applications to greenribbon@isbe.net by Dec. 22.

Questions?

Contact IL Green Alliance: info@illinoisgreenalliance.org or (312) 245-8300.

Grants and other opportunities

[Whole Kids Foundation Salad Bar Grant](#) Any district or independent school participating in the National School Lunch Program can apply. The grant program donates salad bars to U.S. schools to give kids daily access to fresh fruits and vegetables. **Applications are accepted on a rolling basis.**

[KidsGardening Youth Garden Grant](#) Beginning in 2024, [KidsGardening](#) will grant \$500 in funding and a set of gardening supplies to 50 organizations for their youth garden programs. **Deadline: Dec. 15, 2023.**

[USDA School Lunch Equipment Grant](#) School food authorities can seek funding up to \$50,000 for school food service equipment to enhance NSLP/SBP operations, ensuring healthier meals, better food safety, and aiding the School Breakfast Program expansion. **Deadline: Dec. 18, 2023.**

[School Nutrition Foundation Equipment Grants](#) Eligible applicants have the opportunity to win equipment grants, each worth between \$20,000 to \$100,000 of equipment. **Applications open in Jan. 2024.**

[USDA Farm to School](#) USDA is now accepting applications for the next round of USDA

Farm to School Grants, which support local child nutrition programs in serving more fresh and local foods. **Deadline: Jan. 12, 2024.**

President's Environmental Youth Award The President's Environmental Youth Award (PEYA) celebrates exceptional environmental stewardship initiatives crafted by K-12 youth. This program commends a diverse range of projects initiated by young students, school classes, clubs, camps, and youth organizations, all aimed at fostering environmental awareness and action in schools and communities. **Deadline: Jan. 15, 2024.**

Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators The Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators honors exceptional K-12 teachers who demonstrate creativity in environmental education. The award will be granted to up to two teachers from each of the Environmental Protection Agency's 10 regions, representing various states. **Deadline: Jan. 15, 2024.**

Outdoor Classroom Challenge Project Green Schools invites schools across the nation to participate in the Outdoor Classroom Challenge. The challenge encourages schools to create and implement meaningful outdoor classrooms and learning spaces. Participants have the chance to compete for a Grand Prize of \$10,000 to enhance existing outdoor spaces or establish new ones. **Deadline: Jan. 19, 2024.**

Partnerships for Local Agriculture & Nutrition Transformation in Schools (PLANTS) Grant The Chef Ann Foundation is now accepting submissions for the PLANTS grant initiative. The grant will be awarded to 8 collaborative projects with the focus of transforming school food supply chains. Initiatives should aim to enhance connections community-based food systems and school districts and should promote scratch cooking in schools. **Deadline: Jan. 22, 2024.**

SWANCC Waste Reduction Grant The Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County (SWANCC) is allocating funds to SWANCC member schools to assist in purchasing materials that promote the education and benefits of waste prevention. Grant coordinators may **apply and request** up to \$500 to expand their reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting initiatives. **Deadline: Feb. 1, 2024.**

Events

Leading Change: The Importance of Youth in Civic Engagement | Conservation in the Classroom

Jan. 18, 12:30 cst

Join World Wildlife Fund to hear from Alexia Leclercq who has spearheaded numerous environmental justice campaigns, advocating for national climate and chemical reform legislation, clean water, and addressing aggregate mining pollution. In this session she'll highlight key historical and organizing strategies used by oppressed communities for liberation, emphasizing the crucial role youth play in driving positive change for both people and the planet.

From Food to Flowers Everything Local Conference

Jan. 18, 2 - 4:30 pm, Springfield, IL

This year, Illinois Farm to School Network (IFSN) welcomes school buyers to its conference for Everything Local insights. Partnering with the Illinois Farm Bureau, IFSN will debut Farm to School Ready trainings. School guests will have access to local procurement training, be able to explore the farmer vendor area, and join a networking event with the Land Connection.

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