



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](#)

We look forward to helping more students take climate action at their schools in 2025!



Please consider an end-of-year donation to SGA to help us continue creating resources and further expand our Zero Waste Schools initiatives. Your donation will enable us to implement more zero waste programs that reduce cafeteria waste by 80-90% and engage students in climate action at their schools every day.

[Donate](#)

Lindop School celebrates Plastic Free Lunch Day!



Last month, Lindop School in Broadview, Illinois celebrated their first [Plastic Free Lunch Day](#) (PFLD)! As part of the [Cross Community Climate Collaborative](#) (C4), this Pre-K-8 elementary school is dedicated to reducing waste. Their most recent success was participating in PFLD every day the week of November 18-22. PFLD is just another step in Lindop School's zero waste journey - they launched a share table, recycling, and commercial composting in their lunchroom last May. Since then the school has switched from Styrofoam to compostable trays, eliminated spork packets by using dispensers for sporks and napkins, and now uses bulk condiment bottles rather than providing individual condiment packets.

Lunchroom Supervisor Ann Smith's detailed and enthusiastic planning made the week a huge success and showed that it is easy to reduce plastic in school lunchrooms. Here are just some of their plastic free actions:

- Educational signage and bulletin boards
- Paper straws for Pre-K and no straws for other grades
- Finger foods served to eliminate the need for plastic utensils
- All food placed directly on the tray
- Reusable gloves for lunch service
- Foil/paper cups for fruit instead of plastic cups

Join the movement to get plastic out of school cafeterias by participating in the next [PFLD](#) April 21-25, 2025. Stay tuned for more info!

It's Our Future students at COP29



Five Chicagoland [It's Our Future](#) (IOF) students attended COP29, the UN climate conference. It's safe to say attending the world's biggest climate conference was a truly life-changing experience! To learn more about their perspective on the conference, click [HERE](#).

SGA is grateful for everyone who supported the students and followed along as they shared stories and updates from COP29. In case you missed any of it, you can get all [COP29 articles right here](#). And make sure you're following both It's Our Future on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#), and SGA on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) so you can keep up with SGA's work all year long.

Celebrate the holidays with less waste

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. For **DuPage County residents**, **SCARCE** is offering tablecloths, napkins, plates, and even flatware to help you set a holiday table that's GREEN and welcoming.



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.**

Holiday cards: Try making homemade cards with leftover wrapping or scrap paper to make it more personal. The only cards acceptable for recycling are plain paper cards. Cards with glitter, bows, printed on photo paper, or ones that light up or sing 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.
- 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.
- If you have excess gifts consider re-gifting, hosting a gift exchange, donating to a non-profit, or upcycling your existing gifts.

Holiday lights collection



Not sure what to do with your non-working holiday lights? This December, Reduce Waste Chicago will be hosting its fourth-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 will also be providing free recycling for the holiday lights and extension cords begins Friday, Nov. 29, 2024, and continues through Friday, January 17, 2025. To learn more click [HERE](#).

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

contest winner announced

The [2025 International Compost Awareness Week](#) (ICAW) poster contest winner is Abbie Sawyer from Athens, Georgia. Her entry was chosen from the hundreds of entries received from around the world.

Abbie's poster design was carved out of linoleum, hand-printed, and digitized to add color and text. The top of the poster shows off the skyline of Athens, Georgia, with the green roof of City Hall visible in the top left corner.

Sawyers's design reflects ICAW's 2025 theme of: **"Sustainable Communities Begin with Compost!"** since, in the artist's words, *"communities rely on organic recycling on all scales...It's time for us to embrace decay and rot on."*

To read more about ICAW, click [HERE](#).



Illinois Green Ribbon Schools



The [Illinois Green Ribbon Schools Application](#) is currently accepting submissions! This program celebrates schools with active initiatives and unwavering dedication to fostering sustainability awareness and education. In collaboration with the [Illinois State Board of 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.

Contact IL Green Alliance with questions: info@illinoisgreenalliance.org or (312) 245-8300. **Submit applications to greenribbon@isbe.net by Dec. 20.**

Grants and other opportunities

Plastic Free Restaurants Plastic Free Restaurants is dedicated to eliminating single-use petroleum-based products in everyday foodware. Plastic products are not only harmful to the environment but also human health. Their subsidy program is available to schools, non-profits, restaurants, and other for-profit entities to purchase safe reusable foodware products. Apply for a subsidy [HERE](#).

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.**

Youth Outdoor Equity Leadership Fund The Children & Nature Network invites young leaders in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada between the ages of 16 and 30 to request up to \$500 to grow professionally as a leader in the movement or to implement projects that create change in equitable access to nature, community health, well being, and justice. **Applications are accepted on a rolling basis.**

[Consumer Recycling Education and Outreach Grant Program](#) supports local waste management and recycling programs as well as improve public education and outreach. **Apply by Dec. 20, 2024.**

[Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program](#) is accepting applications and will award up to \$12 million to plan, develop, and implement farm to school projects. **Apply by Jan. 10, 2025.**

[EPA: President's Environmental Student and Teacher Awards](#) EPA is requesting applications for the 2025 President's Environmental Youth Awards and Presidential Innovation Awards for Environmental Educators. The awards recognize outstanding environmental stewardship projects from students and outstanding school educators who integrate environmental education into their school. **Apply by Jan. 15.**

[Slingshot Challenge](#) The Slingshot Challenge from the National Geographic Society invites students aged 13-18 to submit a 1-minute video describing their idea for solving environmental issues. Receive up to \$10,000 in funding. **Apply by Feb. 7, 2025.**

Events

[Lower Your Health Risk: Reduce Plastic](#)

Dec. 16, 6:30 - 7:30 pm, Sketchbook Brewing Co., 4901 Main St., Skokie

Join others, either in person or virtually, for a presentation and discussion with experts on the health risks of plastic.

[From Food to Flowers Everything Local Conference](#)

Jan. 29 - 31, 2 - 4:30 pm, Bank of Springfield Center, 1, Convention Center Plaza, Springfield, IL
Illinois Farm Bureau is once again a proud sponsor alongside the Illinois Specialty Growers Association and the Illinois Farmers Market Association to bring you the annual *From Food to Flowers: Everything Local Conference*. Schools, early care, child boarding facilities, and other child feeding sites join Illinois Farm to School for the free *Next Gen Bootcamp*, a coordinated training event at the conference that will take a deep dive into IL Harvest of the Month and provide insight into creating connections to community and the local food value chain. Register [HERE](#).

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