



JANUARY 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](#)

Ending 2024 on a high note



On December 11, 2024, Lincoln Elementary in [Bellwood School District 88](#) successfully launched their zero waste lunchroom! It was clear that students were well-educated and well-prepared to take on sorting their lunch waste since they caught on quickly to the new routine. Part of this routine includes using a [share table](#) in the lunchroom where students can place uneaten, sealed food items from the school lunch. Staff can then redistribute the food to students after school instead of throwing it out. Enthusiastic student Zero Waste Ambassadors took on a leadership role and helped their peers compost and recycle by showing them which items belong in which bin.

Lincoln Elementary's program is sure to thrive long term since school leadership has embraced the program by setting clear expectations for students and staff which will ultimately lead to a shift in the school culture.

Holiday lights collection



Not sure what to do with your non-working holiday lights? [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 Nov. 29, 2024, and continues through Jan. 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](#).

Not sure what to do with your Holiday tree? The city of Chicago is also offering free holiday tree recycling at 27 citywide locations during Jan. 11 - 25, 2025. Each year many Christmas trees are tossed into the landfill. This year, make a change and drop off your Christmas tree to be turned into useful mulch which city residents can receive in the following weeks. To learn more and to find a location near you, click [HERE](#).

Make a plan to compost in 2025

Try something new this year that takes a little effort but has a BIG impact on the health of the planet-start composting! Illinois has many ways for businesses and residents to have food scraps picked up and taken to a compost processing facility. Commercial haulers, food scrap pick-up services, and drop-offs offer options for keeping this valuable resource out of the landfill. By keeping food waste out of landfills, greenhouse gas emissions can be greatly reduced.



The [Illinois Food Scrap and Composting Coalition](#) works to advance diversion and composting of all organics in Illinois through advocacy, program implementation, market and business development, policy, and outreach. Check out their [website](#) to see if your municipality has an existing program. And to find a hauler in your area, click [HERE](#). If you're in Chicago, check out the the City of Chicago's [food scrap drop-off program](#) that offers 20 different free drop-off locations for Chicago residents spread throughout Chicago.

If you'd like to get your school started diverting food scraps, contact us at zerowaste@sevengenerationsahead.org.

Green Schools Conference 2025

March 3 - 4, Orlando, FL

The [Green Schools Conference](#) (GSC) is the only event to bring together all stakeholders involved in making green schools a reality: people



GREEN SCHOOLS CONFERENCE

who lead, operate, build, and teach in schools. Designed to educate, connect, and inspire, attendees will receive action-oriented training across disciplines and make lasting connections with peers and colleagues

during targeted opportunities to exchange best practices and enhance green school initiatives nationwide.

The 2025 event will convene the green schools community in the LEED Gold City of Orlando at the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista at Disney Springs to celebrate 15 years of the GSC during a two-day experience comprised of four workshops, 24 educational sessions, two main stage moments, four local tours, and dedicated networking opportunities.

GSC is presented by the [Center for Green Schools](#) at the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), in partnership with the [Green Schools National Network \(GSNN\)](#).

Register [HERE](#).

Beyond Plastics Pollution online course

Judith will be teaching her highly acclaimed online Beyond Plastics class through Bennington College again in February. This virtual class is open to everyone, including all high school and college students who may choose to take it for academic credit. Together, you will delve into almost every aspect of plastic pollution and what we can do to address the problem.



The class meets by Zoom on seven consecutive Wednesday evenings from 7 - 9 pm cst from **Feb. 19 - April 2**. Cost is \$100 to audit or \$400 if you want college credit. Spaces fill up quickly! Learn more and register [HERE](#). Email capa@bennington.edu for more information.

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.**

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.**

IEPA Poster Contest The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency invites students to participate in their annual Poster, Poetry, Prose, and Video Contest. The theme of the 2025 competition is “How Can You Slash Your Trash?”, inviting students to think creatively about how to reduce the amount of waste they produce. **Apply by Feb. 3.**

Slingshot Challenge The Slingshot Challenge from the National Geographic Society invites students ages 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.**

Events

Repurpose with a Purpose: A look behind the new toolkit for foodservice professionals

Jan. 13, 12 - 1 pm cst

Join ReFED and the Menus of Change University Research Collaborative for a virtual event that explores the new toolkit, "Repurpose with a Purpose." The toolkit is designed to provide actionable, cost-effective strategies and recipes to utilize high-quality prepped ingredients that would otherwise be wasted.

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, Illinois Specialty Growers Association, and the Illinois Farmers Market Association bring you the annual *From Food to Flowers: Everything Local Conference*. Schools, early care, child boarding facilities, and other child feeding sites are invited to 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](#).

Loyola University Chicago: Climate Change Conference

Mar. 12 - 15

Loyola University Chicago's 2025 Climate Change Conference will explore strategies for developing just solutions to the emerging water crisis. Speakers will discuss how people are working to protect water resources on global, regional, and local levels. The event will also provide opportunities for participants to become part of the solution and positively impact people and the planet.

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