



## FEBRUARY 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

### Rhode Island and reusables



Reusable food ware in a school lunchroom can seem like an impossible goal, but a recent article in the Washington Post showcased a school that made the switch look easy!

Brown Avenue Elementary, an elementary school in Rhode Island with around 200 students, has found success in their transition away from single-use disposables. They recently switched from Styrofoam lunch trays to stainless steel trays following the [plastic-foam ban](#) initiated by Rhode Island's state government. This ban was created as a result of the [Food and Drug Administration's](#) (FDA) determination that styrene, a chemical used to make polystyrene foam trays, can lead to negative health outcomes. Manasa Mantravadi, founder of the reusable food ware company, [Ahimsa](#), shares that Styrofoam trays, especially when exposed to heat, pose a significant health risk to children. Dangerous chemicals from polystyrene foam containers leech into food exposing children to potential carcinogens and other toxic chemicals.

By switching to reusables, not only are Brown Avenue's students being protected from harmful chemicals, but the school has incurred a cost savings. According to school officials, they will save \$3,500 per year as a result of the switch. The health benefits of transitioning away from foam food ware, coupled with the potential for cost savings, has already inspired other nearby schools to follow suit.

To read the full article, click [HERE](#).

It's Our Future webinar  
Students Talk Trash: Zooming in on Zero Waste

Feb. 18, 7 pm, virtual

[It's Our Future](#), the youth arm of Seven Generations Ahead is hosting a conversation with youth from CPS' Solorio Academy in an effort to support high school students in reducing plastics and food waste in their schools. Attend to find out how school lunches can be a "tool for youth empowerment" and how students can make a real difference in the cafeteria.

High school students and teachers are encouraged to attend! Register [HERE](#).



## Get ready for Plastic Free Lunch Day!



The biannual [Plastic Free Lunch Day](#) (PFLD) is coming up on **April 21-25!** PFLD, presented by [Cafeteria Culture](#) and the [Urban School Food Alliance](#), is an easy way for schools to ease into reducing disposable packaging and foodware. Schools can participate for one day, a couple days, or the whole week.

Get your school excited for PFLD by presenting a [free screening](#) of [Microplastic Madness](#) during the months of March and April. Start [planning](#) NOW by checking out these great ideas!

Consider meeting with your school's food service staff to implement one or more of these changes:

- Replace single-use condiment packets with bulk service of sauces/dressings
- Wrap sandwiches in bulk (put in serving trays with an aluminum foil cover instead of individually wrapped with plastic film)
- Offer plastic utensils upon request only

Read [HERE](#) to learn more about the most recent PFLD.

## One Earth Collective Young Filmmakers Contest 2025



Students ages 8 through 25 are invited to submit their short environmental films to the [Young Filmmakers Contest](#) by **May 25, 2025**. Film topics vary depending on age level. Submissions must share and highlight solutions to the issues discussed in the

chosen sustainability topic(s). Scholarship awards, prizes, and matching grants (from \$100 to \$1000) are on offer for 3- to 8- minute films or 45+ second animations.

Winning films will be screened at the special Gene Siskel Film Center on **Sept. 21, 2025**, and/or at the [One Earth Film Festival](#) in **April 2026**. Questions? Please contact Lisa Files at [lisa@oneearthfilmfest.org](mailto:lisa@oneearthfilmfest.org).

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## 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 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.



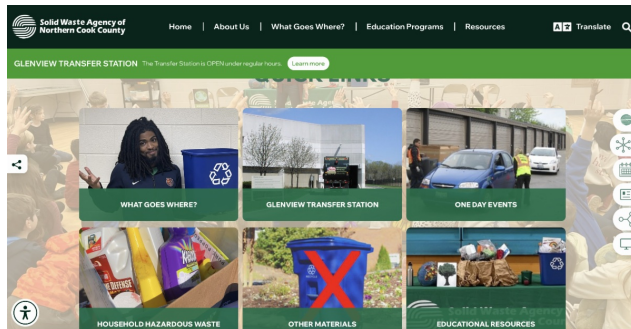
The 2025 event will convene the green schools community in the LEED Gold City of Orlando at the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista at Disney Springs to celebrate 15 years of the GSC during a two-day experience comprised of four workshops, 24 educational sessions, two main stage moments, four local tours,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

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## SWANCC's new website



The [Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County](#) (SWANCC) has just released their updated website! While the address remains the same, SWANCC has fully revamped their platform to be more user-friendly and utilizes modern features to make the user experience even better.

Updates to the website include a new design, easier navigation, mobile-friendly experience, updated content, e-notify features, and Recycle Coach. Recycle Coach is replacing SWANCC's old Reuse and Recycling Directory and will help users identify correct practices and locations to properly recycle materials.

[School Programs](#) and [Waste Reduction Grants](#) can now be accessed through the main menu under Education Programs and Educational Resources are now found under the Resources tab.

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## Grants and other opportunities

[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.**

**Illinois Conservation Foundation's Conservation Achievement Scholarship** Awarded to 4 high school seniors in Illinois who have demonstrated effective, voluntary, and longterm dedication to the preservation, protection, enhancement, and/or promotion of Illinois' natural resources. **Apply by Mar. 1.**

**Whole Kids Garden Grant** Schools and nonprofits have the potential to earn a \$3,000 grant to support or create an edible educational garden to educate students and community members about the importance of local food systems. **Apply by Mar. 5.**

**2025 SNF Equipment Grants** Eligible applicants have the opportunity to win equipment grants, each worth between \$20,000 to \$100,000 of equipment. **Apply by Mar. 12.**

**ComEd Green Region Grant** Now in its thirteenth year, the ComEd Green Region Grant awards grants of up to \$10,000 for conservation projects in Northern Illinois. Continuing this year, non-profits and educational agencies can apply for a grant with a letter of support from a government agency in their community. **Apply by Mar. 28.**

**Algalita Studen Mini Grant** this grant is for students (ages 11-25) looking for financial support toward their project, internship, or education connected to addressing the plastic crisis and adjacent environmental issues. Mini-grants range from \$300 – \$2000 with a total of **\$15,000** being awarded in 2025. **Apply by April 15.**

**OurEcho Challenge** EarthEcho International invites students between the ages of 13-16 to apply for the 2025 OurEcho Challenge, a STEM competition focusing on biodiversity. Participants can work individually or in teams of up to three, proposing solutions to local ecosystem threats. **Apply by April 22.**

**Shane McConkey EcoChallenge** empowers young people to learn about environmental issues in their community, engage in critical thinking, identify innovative solutions, and take action as EcoChallengers for the planet. The competition is open to individuals or teams of students (pre-K through undergraduate students). Students under the age of 18 must have an adult advisor. **Apply by April 22.**

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## Events

### **SCARCE Open House**

**Feb. 17, 9:30 - 3:30, 800 S. Rohlwing Rd, Unit D, Addison, IL**

Join a free behind-the-scenes tour to see how SCARCE reuses, recycles, and educates.

### **Food Waste Prevention Week: Partner Info Session**

**Feb. 18, 12 pm cst**

FWPW is hosting two information sessions with the Food Waste Prevention Week team to explain how you and your organization can become an official partner for the event. Sign up for one of these sessions to learn more!

### **20th Annual Chicago Food Justice Summit**

**Mar. 12 - 14, South Shore Cultural Center, Chicago, IL**

Join the Chicago Food Policy Action Council online for two days of virtual workshops and sessions, then come together in person on March 14th at the South Shore Cultural Center for a celebration of the powerful impact of the last 20 years and a moment of collective visioning for what comes next.

### **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.

## Food Waste Prevention Week

**Apr. 7 - 13**

Food waste prevention week is dedicated to fostering real cultural change on food waste. Participating in this week contributes to a cause that significantly impacts the reduction of food waste, promotes a healthier environment, saves families money, and addresses food insecurity in communities.

Seven Generations Ahead | [Email](#) | [Website](#)



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