

Whittier Elementary School

2023 Creative Use of Resources Award Winner



The Project:

Whittier's 5th grade classes participated in a lunch room waste audit on 3/13/23. The kids sorted all the lunchroom garbage into categories and weighed it. They discussed what was wasted, potential recycling options and ways to improve. The activity was led by the Scarce non-profit organization.

Project Focus: Indoor Environmental Quality, Waste Reduction

Staff Involved: 5

Location: Downers Grove, IL

Students: 45



I'm hopeful that [this project] will lead to future positive changes that will make an impact and lead Whittier to the path of net zero.



The Process:

It was identified at Whittier School that even though a process was already set into place to discard liquids during the lunch period, the milk cartons were not being recycled. This was a hands-on activity that involved the 5th grade classes. With the help of the Scarce non-profit organization they set up tarps in the gym with sorting stations. Then, they dumped all the lunchroom garbage in the middle and the kids sorted into whole organic, partial organic, plastics, landfill, metals and paper/cardboard. The students divided the garbage into each category. Then, they weighed each category and discussed what they found interesting about the results (a lot of whole sandwiches and fruit thrown away!) and what ideas they had for improving and reducing waste. 5th grade teachers Mrs. Lyons & Mrs. Hodowski, and director of buildings and grounds Kevin Barto also assisted.

The Outcomes:

Based on the results the kids came up with ideas to reduce waste. For example, they said they could tell their parents to just pack half a sandwich, take home what they don't eat for a snack later, use reusable containers instead of plastic bags etc. In the future, the Green Team hopes to investigate composting, potentially implement a "Waste Free Wednesdays" where kids try their best to pack reusable containers and bring home messaging to their parents on what they could do better to help reduce food waste. Whittier also hopes to renegotiate the waste hauler contract to include recycling milk cartons. The 5th graders will help lead the charge and get the entire school involved.

