

# John Hancock College Prep High School

## 2026 Project Report



### The Project:

Students at John Hancock College Prep launched Not Just Trash Talk, to restructure and improve the school's recycling protocols, and connect this work to broader sustainability goals on campus to express that recycling is just one component of a broader system of sustainable use of land, water, and consumable materials. They redesigned the school's recycling system, planted native trees, and introduced rainwater collection, illustrating to the entire school how waste, water, and land are all connected.

**Project Focus:** Waste & Native Plants

**Students involved:** 6

**Staff Involved:** 5

**Location:** Chicago, IL



This project centers around the idea that the best sustainable practices are the ones that people will actually sustain.



### The Process:

By completing the IGSP Sustainability Self-Assessment and Building Walkthrough, students discovered that while every classroom had a recycling bin, the contents were being combined with landfill waste, with only cardboard recycled separately. They met with custodial staff to determine how they could expand the school's recycling capabilities without increasing custodial workloads. Students have since taken leadership in collecting recycling from classrooms and transporting it to the recycling dumpster each week. The green team also met with folks from the Morton Arboretum Chicago Region Trees Initiative to plan improvements to the school grounds. They mapped locations for new trees and planted 10 native trees on campus. They also installed rain barrels to collect water and created a volunteer schedule to water the trees weekly for the next three years.

### The Outcomes:

Through their IGSP Project, the John Hancock Green Team embedded sustainability within the school's culture and campus. They successfully took ownership over their school's recycling system and increased the diversity of materials being recycled at the school. They also collaborated with external stakeholders to plant 10 native trees and installed rain barrels to care for the trees while reducing potable water waste. Throughout the year, they inspired additional students to join the cause, and made updates that did not overwork the custodial staff. To continue building on their success, the Green Team is recording an educational video to instruct students on proper recycling procedures during the upcoming year's orientation, and hope to expand their food waste campaign to include lunchroom composting in the near future.

