

William H. Ray Elementary School

2026 Project Report



The Project:

Ray Elementary's Student Council took steps to embed sustainability in their school culture by establishing Ray's first Sustainability Committee, drafting their first sustainability mission statement, and taking important steps to restart paper recycling. With these new institutional frameworks, students led the installation of classroom recycling systems, created educational materials, and ensured that recycling and environmental responsibility become embedded practices across the school community.

Project Focus: Waste Management

Students involved: 30

Staff Involved: 8

Location: Chicago, IL

Students impacted: 550



Having a body to actively monitor our newly renewed recycling program and to advocate for more sustainable practices is an achievement we are proud of.



The Process:

By completing the IGSP Sustainability Self-Assessment and Building Walkthrough, the Ray Student Council discovered that while their school had a recycling contract and collection dumpster in place, classrooms lacked recycling bins, signage, and awareness, making the existing system ineffective. This led the team to form Ray's first Sustainability Committee, including students, teachers, parents, and custodial staff. This group collaborated to write the school's first sustainability mission statement to guide its long-term efforts. Using their IGSP Mini Grant, they ordered recycling and trash bins for schoolwide distribution, created signage and an educational slideshow, and partnered with custodial staff to coordinate collection logistics. Students delivered bins to classrooms and began leading presentations to teach peers how and why to recycle, embedding sustainability into daily routines.

The Outcomes:

The project resulted in both immediate systems change and long-term culture building. Paper recycling resumed across most classrooms, with custodial staff collecting and transporting materials regularly. Students have been encouraging peers to recycle, demonstrating growing ownership of sustainable habits. Just as importantly, the establishment of a Sustainability Committee and mission statement created a permanent structure to guide future initiatives, monitor progress, and expand efforts. Building on this foundation, students have already launched a cafeteria share table, partnered with local organizations for food donations, and are exploring composting and waste tracking to deepen impact schoolwide.

