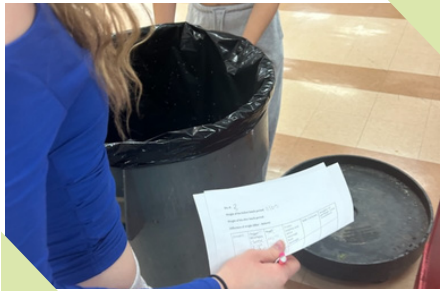


Whitney Young Magnet High School

2026 Second Place - High School Division

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The Project:

Whitney Young Magnet High School's Environmental Club led a data-driven project to reduce cafeteria food waste through the implementation of lunchtime share tables and Love Fridge food donation collections. By conducting pre- and post-implementation waste audits, students measured how redistributing unopened food items can reduce landfill waste while supporting community food-sharing efforts.

Project Focus: Food Waste Management

Students involved: 23

Staff Involved: 1

Location: Chicago, IL

Students impacted: 600



We want to reduce the amount of waste our school creates while helping our community by donating healthy lunch items.



The Process:

Led by student leader Nichelle Gyabin and supported by their sponsoring teacher and IGSP mentor, Environmental Club members first conducted a pre-implementation waste audit, with student "lunch monitors" weighing discarded meal items during a 45-minute lunch period to better understand the food waste landscape of the school. Once they had established a baseline, they developed lunchroom donation spaces called "share tables," where students could donate their unopened leftovers to other students and the broader community through Love Fridge, a local community-run food donation program. Students created flyers explaining how to use the share table, shared announcements via Instagram and the school newsletter, and surveyed peers about their food waste habits. After implementing the program, students repeated the audit to understand their impact.

The Outcomes:

Following the implementation of the share table, students recorded a 22.6-lbs reduction in lunchroom waste for the lunch period. Waste audit data showed significant recovery of milk cartons, fruit, and packaged items that would have otherwise been discarded. The project successfully shifted student behavior by providing a visible, practical alternative to throwing away uneaten food. The team plans to present their findings and data spreadsheet to the school council, expand share tables to additional lunchrooms, and continue conducting audits and regular food deliveries to community Love Fridges to sustain both environmental and social impact.

