

A MODEL SCHOOL RECYCLING PROGRAM, BUILT BY TEAMWORK

The Lavallette Elementary School, off of Route 35 in one of New Jersey's shore communities serves 143 children in grades K-8 with 30 staff members. While small, the school has the best example of a school recycling program that I have ever seen. Not only does the program have support from its top administration, but also from "Mr. George," its Head of Maintenance – and key teachers, staff, and of course, students.

On a typical day, student members of the Environmental Club get in before school starts, and go, in teams of at least two, to pre-assigned locations in the building to collect recyclables, remove contaminants from the recyclables and transfer the recyclables to large wheeled carts in the cafeteria. Bottles and cans are collected and transferred every day; mixed paper is transferred once or twice a week. "Mr. George," whose real name is George Solly moves filled carts to the rear of the building for pick up by the town. The town also picks up trash from the school dumpster.

Mr. Solly explained that the school has been separating and collecting recyclables for a number of years, but that originally, recyclables would be simply placed outside the school alongside the trash dumpster in bags labeled with the type of recyclables inside. He found that this led to the recyclables being mixed with the trash instead of being sent on as recyclables. Since the school purchased the carts, town employees picking up the recycling treat it as recycling. Lavallette Borough picks up both waste and recycling from the school, along with its

other pick ups. Each ton of recycling sent saves the town \$69.70 in landfill tipping fees.

Additionally, each ton of recycling saves a ton and a half of carbon dioxide emissions, on average.

In 2006, Lavallette School recycled 3010 pounds of mixed paper and 1010 pounds of bottles and cans. While the recyclables collected by the tiny school last year only added up to a little more than \$140 in savings, the students and teachers saved over three tons of carbon dioxide equivalent during that same year.

Spanish teacher Judy Merritt, aka “Señora Merritt,” and Jill Lorenz, the science teacher, got students involved in the collection and transfer of recyclables about two years ago, following up on written commitments they made for Earth Day. As noted above, students join the Environmental Club, and are assigned various locations throughout the school from which to collect recyclables each morning. Students have gloves to avoid safety issues, and are well versed in the list of materials which can and cannot be recycled. Every room in the school has clustered containers for recycling and for trash. This, along with clear signs created by the students, makes the system practically goof proof – although people still put in tissues and other non-recyclable items and need reminders. Having the containers clustered means that people do not have to walk to find a recycling bin.

Last school year, the sixth grade members of the Environmental Club produced a Power Point presentation which explained all aspects of the recycling program, with the help of “Mr. George.” The primary purpose for the Power Point was so the Environmental Club could present it to each class of students in the school, and teach them all what their responsibilities were in the new recycling program. Each sixth grader was responsible for producing at least

one slide for the presentation, so that each student learned some computer skills as they worked on the presentation.

As they transfer recyclables from classrooms and other rooms to the cafeteria, Environmental Club members keep track of where problems occur, so that they can ask teachers, students and staff to avoid contaminating recycling, to take caps off bottles and pour out liquids, or to deal with other similar concerns.

Besides the traditional recyclables which are collected and picked up by the town, members of the Environmental Club also collect printer cartridges and return them to Staples for cash as a school fund raiser. The Environmental Club has also just started collecting used cell phones, toner cartridges, and print cartridges that are sold to "Print Again Ink" a company that pays cash for them. So far they have earned \$78.00 which they plan to donate to beach replenishment programs at near-by Island Beach State Park. So these students are also serving as a source of information for places to recycle other non-traditional items; for example, they encourage members of the school community to bring plastic shopping bags back to a local supermarket for recycling.

Each year, members of the Environmental Club teach new members from lower grades how the system works, so that it can go on successfully, year to year.