

How to Prevent the Single Biggest Waste Day at your School

DESK & LOCKER LEFTOVERS



An environmental locker/desk clean-out is a great end of the school year activity. It is easy to do, requires little preparation, is highly visible, and is a great waste reducer. It involves all of the “R’s” that a school should be focused on -- reduce, reuse, recycle *and* reject.

HOW TO GET STARTED:

Remind students that most items in the desk/locker have been purchased with their money, and often these belongings can still be used. A sweatshirt can be a proud hand-me-down to a younger sibling, not trashed to a landfill. Encourage them to take everything home -- clothing, shoes, partially-used notebooks, school supplies (i.e. calculators, rulers), backpacks, lunch containers, binders in good condition, etc.

This project has been successful using several different approaches.

1. The entire student body can be responsible for sorting their “cast-offs” into suggested categories listed below. Monitors may be assigned to oversee each area in order that mistakes don’t occur.
2. Or, an organization such as your school environmental club, can separate the “trash” after the entire school has cleaned out their desks or lockers.

Prior to the clean-out day, designate an area for “unwanted” items. The gym or multipurpose room works well. Post signs indicating the different categories and place large boxes under each sign. This could include areas for:

- old shoes (singles or pairs) -- can be recycled: NIKE Factory Store for recycling (Premium Outlet Mall, I-88 & Farnsworth, Aurora IL 630-585-9568). SCARCE holds athletic shoe collections in the spring (4/22-5/20, 2008 – call for more information).
- articles of clothing -- to be washed later and donated to a charity

- reusable paper & spiral notebooks -- put in media center for “forgetful” students the following year
- P.E. clothing – to be washed and given to P.E. Department for use by students who are without uniforms
- reusable school supplies (pens, pencils, rulers, art supplies, etc.)-- put in media center
- books -- see handling of old textbooks page
- used paper for recycling
- aluminum, glass & plastic for recycling

Be flexible enough to create as many categories as you can use, once the “leftovers” are gathered.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE:

The Earth Club, under the guidance of Ken Evans, at Lake Park High School in Roselle has sponsored a Locker Clean-Out for several years. On the given day, each earth club member spent their study hall period sorting through the materials. Between 8:00 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., during each school period approximately ten students worked diligently.

At one clean-out they collected 84 large garbage bags of materials. At day’s end, only 3 trash bags were sent to the dumpster. They collected a stack of unused white notebook paper 8 feet high, a stack of usable spiral notebooks 6 feet high, and hundreds of pens and pencils. These reusable materials were placed in the library and made available to students (for free!) during the next school year. Some of the reusable supplies were sent to needy organizations in Africa and Eastern Europe. Clothing and shoes were washed and taken to the Salvation Army.

Helpful Tips:

- If a club or organization is doing the sorting, make sure students are committed to the project. If it is a relatively small group, they may have to stay after school to finish and/or clean up.
- Discuss the process/system with the administration. Students must be permitted to go to the sorting area during their “free time”.
- Notify the public relations person for the School District about the event.
- Discuss the system with the custodial staff.
- If the group has some money available, order pizzas and pop for all the “volunteers”. (Lake Park HS also buys pizza for the custodians and maintenance staff as a thank you for helping to recycle throughout the year.)
- In a faculty newsletter or bulletin, explain the project. Some staff members may allow students out of scheduled classes and then have them make up missed work for the day.
- Have a storage area for all the paper and supplies saved for the following school year.
- Identify local outlets for reusable items (i.e. Goodwill drop-off, Lions eyeglass program, AAUW book reuse sites)

TURN YOUR STUDENTS INTO GARBOLOGISTS!!