

Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School

Minimizing School Waste: What is Waste and Where Does It Go?

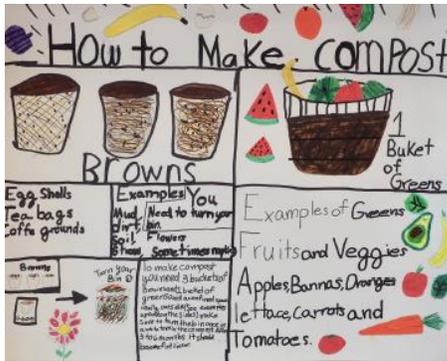
PROJECT BACKGROUND

At Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School, we strive to be stewards of the environment. If you toured our school, you would read the quote by Pirkei Avot 2:21, "It is not up to you to finish the task of repairing the world, but neither are you free to neglect it." We take this quote seriously, spending time exploring the environment and learning about sustainability. Initially, we had the goal of reducing waste at lunch, but once we started the work, we couldn't stop. Now, our students and staff are continuously looking for ways to reduce waste everywhere. We are hooked!

STRATEGIES AND RESULTS

We realized that we could reduce quite a bit by making simple changes. As part of our 2018-2019 Green Schools Quest participation, we brainstormed with our students and observed what was being wasted and where most of our trash was coming from. Classrooms set up waste stations for trash and recycling, as well as Trex and TerraCycle collections. We found that we could reduce office supply items like paper, markers and crayons. We also decided to do a better job sorting and collecting waste at lunch. Focusing on simple basic changes kicked off our diversion plan.

We quickly realized that many students were using plastic cups & utensils in the lunchroom, which really add up. Using water fountains to refill water bottles requires a lot of time, so kids were skipping the task and opting for a plastic cup. To help remedy this, first graders created a fundraiser. They sold water bottles to encourage students to use reusable water bottles at school and to raise money for two refillable water bottle stations. Before 24% of students brought water bottles to lunch - we are now up to 37%. Meanwhile, third graders created reusable utensil pouches and taught others, which inspired other students to bring their own utensils to lunch in a fun way. At the beginning of the year, 1% of students brought reusable utensils, which increased to 37% by the end of the year.



Learning from others and getting the word out about our efforts across the school was critical in our success. To do this, we held a Walk to School Day, followed by a Waste Expo in which all grades shared waste themes with Mirowitz families. We also held a waste-themed STEAM Day - each grade explored a project through the lens of waste. We made a movie of both of these events to share on our website and linked it to our school newspaper. To learn from others, our Green Schools Quest mentor visited multiple times for lunch waste audits and learning. We also had

special visits from the Missouri Botanical Garden's EarthWays Center, an environmental scientist and an environmental architect.

In the course of the project, our fourth grade students become so enthralled by our theme that many decided to lobby their representatives in Jefferson City in favor House Bill 47 - Missouri Food Waste. One student wrote to her representative, "I think this Bill should pass because it will help a lot of needy people and cut down on food waste in landfills. Did you know, 795 million people in the world do not have enough food to lead a healthy, active life? Did you know that 15 million kids in America are hungry? Did you also know \$165 billion worth of food gets thrown away every year? It is really sad that we waste all this food when there are people that need it." Clearly, our students are not only reducing their waste, but feeling empowered to use their voice for change.

ABOUT SAUL MIROWITZ JEWISH COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School is a small independent school in Creve Coeur, Missouri. Our campus partners with our neighboring synagogue, B'nai Amoona as well as other Jewish synagogues. We service students in kindergarten through eighth grade and have 180 students. There is a strong focus on environmental studies and community stewardship within the Jewish community and in our school. Students are encouraged to work together to take on projects that repair the world and are often involved in both self-directed and class project service learning opportunities.

"Sorting the waste in the lunchroom taught me that there was a lot of waste! We saw that a lot of people don't eat their food. This showed us that we should eat more of our food or pack less. We shouldn't be wasting so much."

Max Kushnir & Shira Dean
4th grade students



Project: Minimizing School Waste
Location: St. Louis, MO
Timeframe: 2018-2019 School Year

Waste Diversion Statistics

- During the project, lunch waste - measured in two audits - **decreased by nearly 7 pounds, and the amount recycled increased by 5%.**
- TerraCycle collections went from zero at the start of the year to 63,798 units by March 2019.
- Three Trex collection sites in the school turned in 5 full boxes to local grocery stores since November 2018.
- First graders a marker and crayon recycling effort, **sending about 600 markers to Crayola to repurpose.**
- Classes cut back on paper towels use by replacing them with reusable cloths, **diverting an estimated 3,478 power towels from the landfill.**

About USGBC-Missouri Gateway Chapter

USGBC-MGC is a community of members, advocates, and practitioners that gives voice to our commitment to improve human health, support economies, and protect the environment through green buildings. The Chapter serves the community by educating and advocating for green building principles and practices, and believes that everyone deserves access to green and healthy spaces.



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