

Cafeteria Troubleshooting Guide

Lack of Support –

Know that before you start, you already have a lot of great support. Your school (and every DOE school in NYC) has submitted a Sustainability Plan signed by your Principal, Sustainability Coordinator, and Custodian Engineer. This document outlines the specific requirements for cafeteria recycling as in compliance with Chancellor's Regulation A-850, and NYC Local Law 19, and 41. Custodian Engineers have had mandatory recycling trainings, which cover cafeteria recycling, for the past two years, hosted by the NYC DOE Sustainability Initiative, the NYC Dept. of Sanitation, and GrowNYC.

- Support and leadership from your school's administration, Custodian Engineer, and School Food Manager is important to the success of cafeteria recycling. Once they've helped you with the initial organizing and launch, then there won't be more for them to do, but they will benefit from cafeteria recycling by as you will see from the next item on the list. If support remains an issue then partner with a group of students, or staff, to ask for change, this can be a powerful way to generate support.

Litter & Cleanliness –

Part of generating support for cafeteria recycling can come from pointing out the negatives. Litter, lack of cleanliness, and misbehavior in the cafeteria are not reasons why recycling isn't possible, they are reasons to initiate recycling. School Food employees, custodians, and even school safety may be spending an extraordinary amount of time cleaning up after students in the cafeteria. An orderly cafeteria that recycles will save all of these people a lot of time. Students must take personal responsibility for their cafeteria waste, and recycling can be the leverage with which bad habits and behavior are improved. Look within your school's existing lunch structure and schedule to find opportunities to address these issues.

- Should your school reconsider allowing students time outside during lunch when they are leaving behind a dirty cafeteria? Is there a dismissal process that can be reinforced by an AP? Can students be held accountable for their litter and waste by staying after lunch to sweep?



Recycling Champions Resources

Student Participation –

So you've held a cafeteria recycling launch, but many students are still not recycling. Keep in mind that recycling is easy, students are learning far more challenging things during the day, and they must be given a real chance to get better at recycling. Basic things can be done, such as asking School Aides or APs present in the cafeteria to make a quick reminder announcement every day as a way to plug recycling. Student monitors can be helpful in generating positive peer press. Make sure that monitors never clean up for students, they are only there to guide and remind students. Do your sorting stations require more signage or larger signs? Although recycling shouldn't be entirely dependent on incentives, NYC schools have incorporated [TerraCycle \(www.terracycle.net\)](http://www.terracycle.net) campaigns, competitions amongst grades, or set goals with rewards and education along the way.

Storage –

NYC school kitchens do a good job recycling. Find out where the kitchen's recyclables are stored or placed prior to going out to the curbside – cafeteria recyclables could be placed with them. Recyclables are not picked up every day by the NYC Dept. of Sanitation (DSNY), but if you think your school would benefit from additional DSNY recycling pickups, then schedule a walk-through a walk-through with DSNY by clicking, [here](#). As outlined by DSNY, all blue stream recyclables (metal, glass, plastic, milk and juice cartons) are picked up curbside, there is no dumpster service for blue stream recyclables. Recyclables can be stored outside besides a dumpster or in an easy to access fenced in area adjacent to the school. There may also be a spare or sparsely used closet or storage area near the kitchen. If this is the case, then Custodians and School Food Managers will need to be in agreement about the location.

Sorting Stations –

Consistency is crucial to developing positive habits. If stations are not out every day, in the same location, then students do not have the opportunity to recycle. School Food employees should not need to bring the sorting stations in and out from the kitchen. If this is happening, speak with your School Food Manager about directing the kitchen staff to keep the stations in their place. If custodians move the stations to clean the floor, please ask the Custodian Engineer to remind his or her staff that the stations should be put back in their place. Also, any School Aides or teachers working with students in the cafeteria should be instructed through a conversation or a Recycling Champions letter to please not bring bins closer to their tables, or wheel them around freely. Trash and recycling bins should always be together. Floors could be marked as to where bins go, or wall-posted signage can be the visual markers of where bins are always to be located.



Recycling Champions Resources

Contaminated Recycling –

Utilizing lids with holes is the best way to limit trash from being placed in a recycling bin. If you have recycling bins with lids and holes, the biggest contaminant will be milk. This is problematic as milk creates odor and vermin issues during storage. As a result, the liquids bucket should be greatly emphasized during the student outreach or recycling launch. Students should also be encouraged to finish their milk before dumping out the remainder. If the milk is frozen, then that carton should be placed in the trash. The NYC Dept. of Sanitation does allow for a small amount of non-recyclables to be in the recycling stream. In other words, it's not the end of the world if a banana peel and a chips bag ends up in the recycling. But of course, a recycling program should always work to limit contamination, and strive for the cleanest stream of recyclables.

Costs –

Cafeteria recycling can happen without your school incurring any additional costs. Most NYC schools already have the supplies to set up recycling in the cafeteria, including the widely used grey, 55 gallon Rubbermaid bins which are used by Custodian Engineers and School Food. Lids are the only variable, and lids to fit the common 55 gallon bins, can be purchased using the Recycling Champions Bin Guide, or through the custodian's SDI catalog. Look to your principal's budget or your custodian engineer's budget to fund the purchase of lids. Any signage should also be protected due to food and liquid spills, therefore the other small cost may be laminating or protecting signage.

Year to Year –

The big picture in NYC schools is that the majority of students will learn to recycle in elementary school and will carry this practice with them through middle and high school. However, if you launch cafeteria recycling to all grades in your school this year, then make sure incoming students are informed about the process during an orientation or their first lunch. This can be organized by the Sustainability Coordinator and executed by students or another member of the staff. A reminder can be sent to your Custodian Engineer and School Food staff at the beginning of the year, with a Recycling Champions pre-drafted letter. Both custodians and school food managers are aware that cafeteria recycling should be happening, and will do their part to make it a part of every school day.



Recycling Champions Resources

