

## CASE STUDY

# Cummer Valley Middle School Toronto, Ontario



Behaviour change doesn't happen overnight ... but it does happen.

## The Situation

Cummer Valley Middle School has approximately 600 students in grades six to eight with 200 students in each of the three grades.

In 2000, students attempted to use the blue bin recycling system in the cafeteria but with little attention to detail. Bins were often contaminated with straws and food waste, and recycling was often found in the garbage.

They also attempted to collect food waste with a small composter bin, but it too proved problematic. With little supervision and an inconsistent approach to collection, transportation and washing of the bin, this quickly became unsanitary and unproductive.

## The Goal

To dramatically improve waste reduction and composting in the school by first helping teachers and students develop a connection to the waste reduction program. To achieve success, the entire school needed to better understand the problems and 'own' the solutions.

## The Outcome

Cummer Valley has had such a reduction in waste that they have just recently converted one of their large four yard waste bins into a recycling bin.

## How It Was Done

Over the years, through much trial and error, a consistent effort was made to educate and inform everyone in the school and the community. A strong communications approach, innovative programming and positive reinforcement proved to be the key to success.

Waste audits have been regularly conducted to accurately determine the type of waste being generated, sources of this waste and the potential causes of waste and recycling 'bad habits'.

Through a collaborative effort among the administration, teachers, students and caretaking staff, outstanding progress has been made.

## Keys to success:

### Communication:

- Created an outdoor sign posted in front of the school to inform the community of progress made and latest initiatives. Also used to promote EcoSchool status engendering a strong sense of pride among community members.
- Posted regular updates in the schools electronic newsletter

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[www.ontario.ca/wastereduction](http://www.ontario.ca/wastereduction)

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- Used high-impact graphic elements throughout the school to help keep the environment top-of-mind. The use of strong imagery and targeted messaging helped remind students and teachers to reduce waste and help the environment.
- Video announcements are fed into the classrooms to model appropriate waste diversion.

### **Build awareness and momentum:**

- EcoGoals were established and promoted based on the waste audit finding. This clearly communicated where there was a need and what the solution/s were to help reduce or eliminate this problem.
- Implemented a 'walk to school Wednesday' program that enabled whole-school participation
- Developed themed days like EcoThought Mondays and EcoTrivia Fridays each week to reinforce a culture of conservation.

### **Recognition:**

- Implemented an awards system called the 'Spirit Point System' to reward positive waste reduction behaviour among teachers and students.
- During the first few weeks of school, the school council asked each class to come up with a team name and work together to earn points for their efforts.
- Points were given to students for: recycling properly; walking to school; using refillable water bottles; and waste free lunches, etc.
- At the end of the year, the winning class in each grade is awarded a class party and the overall winning class creates a banner that is displayed in the cafeteria.