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Green groups prep for back-to-school with Trash Free Lunch Challenge

Reusable lunch boxes will be distributed to first-graders of the following schools on the below dates, times and locations:

Grand View: *At school on August 27, from 9 a.m. to noon on back-to-school night on August 30, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.*

Pacific: *At Kim Castner's home (see school newsletter for address) on August 28, from 3 to 5 p.m.; on campus August 31 from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.*

Pennekamp: *At school on August 31 from 8:15 to 9:30 a.m.*

Robinson: *At school on August 31 from 3 to 4 p.m.*

The City of Manhattan Beach and Waste Management have provided the lunch boxes, which are produced by Go Green Lunch Box, a local company.

In an effort to reduce the amount of trash entering landfills from schools, Grades of Green has partnered with the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County to bring the Trash Free Lunch Challenge to schools.

Students at participating schools will learn the “four R’s” – recycling their milk cartons, reducing the amount of trash they use, reusing items like water bottles, cloth napkins and utensils, and rotting, or composting, their banana peels.

“Grades of Green is helping change kids habits for a lifetime,” said Melissa Bailey, communications director of the organization. She compared learning and practicing the “four R’s” to putting on a seatbelt. “When I was growing up, putting on your seatbelt was not a big thing,” she said, adding, “now, nobody would think twice about it.”

Schools in the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County can register for the challenge online before October 15. The first 10 schools to register will receive materials to help implement the program, including raffle prizes to encourage kids to use trash free lunches, laminated signs to indicate where the kids can recycle, compost or stack trays, reusable lunch boxes, and a campus eco audit from Grades of Green.

The challenge will end in March, after which a panel of judges will visit schools to choose a winner. The winning school receives a \$1,000 education grant.

Each elementary school in Manhattan Beach currently has a trash-free lunch program, saving the school district an estimated \$10,000 in trash liners and trash hauler fees per year, according to Grades of Green.

“We wanted to expand and get it bigger,” said Lisa Coppedge, director of Grades of Green, who mailed letters to the principals of 300 schools in the county to request participation in the challenge.

Bailey noted the importance of reducing trash. “In LA County, we produce enough trash to fill Dodger Stadium from the field to the nosebleed section every day,” she said.