

RedondoBeachPatch

Schools Aim for 'Trash-Free Lunches'

Grades of Green is challenging schools and families across Los Angeles County to mind their waste.

- By [Brantley Watson](#)
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Nonprofit organization Grades of Green has started a movement that is not only spreading across the nation, but across the globe.

Now, the Grades of Green program is extending its eco-friendly hand to schools across Los Angeles County in hopes of solving the problem that is excess waste.

Having touched down in nearly 100 schools across the country, 17 states nationwide, and even reaching out to a school in Australia, the Grades of Green Trash-Free program is gaining steam at schools in the Redondo Beach Unified School District and at [Chadwick School](#) in Palos Verdes via the Trash-Free Lunch Challenge. "It's certainly a program we're excited to have at the school, and it's something we're trying to ramp up even more in terms of student and family awareness," said [Lincoln Elementary School](#) Principal Jeff Winckler. "It creates a really good sense of environmental awareness, and it's just a good habit to get kids into to try to help make a difference."

The Trash-Free Challenge is an effort to reduce waste in schools by utilizing reusable lunch pails, Tupperware, cloth napkins and reusable utensils, among other things.

Each school involved in the challenge will be required to implement their own Trash-Free Lunch program, which will then be evaluated by Grades of Green to see who has the most effective program.

"Our goal is to really reduce the waste at Jefferson, and we've already accomplished that in three weeks since launching the program, from 16 bags of trash during the lunch hour down to only two bags," said Danielle Spangler, chair of the Green Committee at [Jefferson Elementary](#).

"The Jefferson Green Committee and myself feel it is important [that] our school is involved in the local push to eliminate waste to not only be environmentally friendly, but for our children's future and as a matter of survival," said Jefferson Principal Kara Heinrich. "Going green is a changing of practices to safeguard our future and to ensure a healthy survival."

Grades of Green will then award the winning school \$1,000, courtesy of Chevron, in the spring of 2012.

Melissa Bailey, communications director for Grades of Green, explained that a movement that got off to a small start in Manhattan Beach has now extended across the nation at an unprecedented rate.

The Grades of Green program was initially organized by four parents at Grand View Elementary in Manhattan Beach. They came up with the idea of Trash-Free Tuesdays and Walk to School Wednesdays, all with the intention of cleaning up the environment.

The programs were such a success that Grades of Green began to receive nationwide attention.

"Parents from all over the country began calling, wanting to know what this group was doing and how they could do the same things," Bailey said. "That's where the idea of becoming a nonprofit was born."

So far, the Grades of Green eco-friendly movement has been utilized in cities throughout the South Bay, and now, at Chadwick, which plans to implement its program in December.

"We feel it's important because the kids should start early on," said Patrice Harmon, parent coordinator for the Grades of Green project at Chadwick. "They're the ones who have to live in this world when they grow up and we're no longer here. We feel if we instill good habits in them early on, it just becomes a way of living. It becomes something you don't have to think about."

And with the current state of excess waste in Los Angeles County, children may have no other choice but to learn recycling habits.

According to the Grades of Green website, enough trash is produced in Los Angeles County daily to fill Dodger Stadium from the field to the highest seats in the park.

"So many parents don't really think about it—they just stick some chips in a Ziploc bag, put it in a brown paper bag and throw in an Arrowhead water bottle," Bailey said. "People just aren't aware of the amount of trash that's generate and how they help produce that."

The Grades of Green website also estimates that by switching to trash-free lunches, families and schools could save thousands of dollars per year.

Although Spangler said she's experienced difficulty in attempting to make sure "everyone is on board," Winckler said that from the look of things, families at Jefferson seem to have a handle on being trash-free.

"It's interesting because I walk through the lunch room a lot and the kids, they have it down already," Winckler said. "They have the right lunch bag, and they have the container. They don't have plastic bags. It's encouraging."