

Redondo schools compete in Trash-Free Lunch Challenge

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Three Redondo Beach schools will be among 16 Los Angeles area schools that will have a big assignment this school year—to cut their lunchtime trash by 70 percent. They will compete in the County's second annual Trash-Free Lunch Challenge, a contest that rewards schools for reducing lunchtime trash.

The Redondo Beach Unified School District campuses competing include Beryl Heights Elementary, Birney Elementary and Washington Elementary.

The competition, sponsored by the Sanitation Districts of L.A. County (Sanitation Districts), and created by the environmental non-profit group Grades of Green, teaches kids how to reduce trash by switching to reusable lunch containers and water bottles with cloth napkins. Those who buy lunch will learn to sort waste into recycling and composting. Schools that participated in last year's competition reduced their trash by 70 percent on average and diverted more than 10,000 bags of refuse from landfills, all while saving thousands of dollars in bag liner expenses and waste hauler fees.

“We are thrilled that 16 new schools will be implementing the Trash-Free Lunch program this year,” said Grace Robinson Chan, Sanitation Districts Chief Engineer and General Manager. “They will divert more than 10,000 bags of trash destined for landfills this year alone. Even more importantly, it will teach kids better habits that will protect the environment in the years to come.”

“The amount of trash we produce as a society is staggering,” said Lisa Coppedge, Grades of Green director, “but it doesn't have to be that way. A generation ago, we packaged most products in reusable materials—and we can get back to those better habits by teaching kids to be trash free. In this coastal area, trash reduction is even more important, since plastic has insidiously made its way into the ocean food chain.”

The competition gets underway Nov. 7, when representatives from each school will attend a training session and tour of the Sanitation Districts' Puente Hills Landfill and Materials Recovery Facility.

Grades of Green will select three finalists from the 16 competing schools. A panel of environmental experts and other judges will evaluate the implementation and success of the three finalists' programs. The winning school will receive a \$1,000 science grant. The second and third-place schools will receive \$750 and \$500, respectively.

Though the deadline has passed to compete in this year's Trash-Free Lunch Challenge, any school may still initiate a Trash-Free Lunch program. Complete instructions are available at no cost to schools at

www.gradesofgreen.org/initiatives/trash-redux/trash-free-tuesdays.

The Sanitation Districts are a regional agency consisting of 23 independent special districts serving over 5.4 million people in 78 cities and unincorporated territory within Los Angeles County. The Sanitation Districts protect public health and the environment through innovative and cost-effective wastewater and solid waste management, and in doing so convert waste into resources such as reclaimed water, energy, and recycled materials.

Grades of Green is a national non-profit organization that aims to inspire and empower students and the broader school community to care for the environment. It offers free instruction for making schools greener on its website, www.gradesofgreen.org. Anyone who wants to implement sustainability programs can register their schools online—at no cost—to get tips on reducing trash, emissions, and harmful classroom chemicals, plus dozens of other ways to help the environment.

Grades of Green has been honored with many awards, including the U.S. EPA's prestigious Environmental Award. Grades of Green is growing rapidly, with nearly 93,000 students in 23 states and 4 countries enrolled. Its goal is to enroll thousands of schools with millions of kids—all caring for the environment and collectively making a huge impact. For more information on Grades of Green visit www.gradesofgreen.org or contact Nicole Sevier at 310-938-0974. For more information on the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, contact Rupam Soni at 562-908-4288, ext. 2303.