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May 8, 2014

Grades Of Green's Trash Free Lunch Challenge Results Are In!

The winning schools reducing trash by 90%!

by *Subaru Pacific*

Grades of Green just wrapped up its 3rd annual Trash Free Lunch Challenge and the results are off the charts: this year's schools doubled the trash reduction of last year's schools! Even more exciting, over the past three years, participating schools have decreased lunchtime trash by an average of 70%, with the winning schools reducing trash by 90%! The countywide competition, created by Grades of Green, challenges Los Angeles schools to see which school will reduce the most lunchtime waste. Through fun, educational assemblies; personalized eco-starter kits; waste reduction plans; and Grades of Green staff to personally guide each school, Grades of Green helps create an



environment where every school is a winner! Participating schools ask students who bring lunch from home to eliminate trash by using reusable lunch containers, water bottles, and cloth napkins. All students, including those who buy lunch, are taught how to sort waste into recyclables, compost, liquid, and landfill - forming habits that will protect the environment for years to come. At the end of the school year, participating schools are judged based upon how much they were able to:

Create and implement a trash free lunch program that diverts the most trash bags from landfills per day;

Educate the most students/adults within their campus community; and

Establish sustainability of this program for years to come.

This year's Trash Free Lunch Challenge was the most successful yet. 24 diverse and unique elementary, middle, and high schools took part in the challenge to reduce their lunchtime waste and inspire and empower their students. These schools worked hard all year to develop and manage sorting systems to reduce lunchtime waste, continually educate their students and families on the importance of waste reduction, and establish a legacy of environmental leadership that will last. With all the outstanding schools, Grades of Green couldn't pick just three finalists, so we chose a top six! The top three elementary schools were: Lowell Elementary School in Long Beach, McKinley Elementary School in Santa Monica, and Vista del Valle Elementary School in Claremont. The top three middle/high schools were: David Starr Jordan Middle School in Burbank, Jane Addams Middle School in Lawndale, and Parras Middle School in Redondo Beach.

On April 3rd and April 16th we had a panel of environmental experts from organizations like the Sanitations Districts of Los Angeles County, Surfrider, 350 Climate Action Group, Algalita Marine Research Institute, and Grades of Green Youth Corps, that visited the six finalists and were blown away by their incredible programs. Students were on hand to explain how they were able to reduce their waste, what they have learned about caring for the environment, and how they are planning to keep their schools green for years to come. Students explained how they were able to spread awareness by designing signage and posters and creating educational videos and announcements that they were able to show off during the school tours. All of these finalists have created an impressive environmental legacy for their school communities and inspired those around them to take action to care for the earth. After much deliberation, the panel of environmental experts chose Vista del Valle Elementary School in Claremont and Parras Middle School in Redondo Beach as the two Grand Prize winners of this year's Trash Free Lunch Challenge and recipients of \$1,000 science education grants. Out of all the schools represented, the students at these schools were the best at showing the panel of environmental experts

how they have empowered and inspired to create change on their campus through efforts in recycling, composting, and educating their peers and community. Both school communities successfully reduced their lunchtime waste by 90%.

After months of working hard to reduce lunchtime waste, the 2013-14 Trash Free Lunch Challenge has educated over 13,000 students on how to reduce their lunchtime waste; inspired students to pack 5,000 trash free lunches, and empowered the Trash Free Lunch Challenge schools to divert approximately 42,000 bags of trash from their landfill this school year. All 24 Trash Free Lunch Schools have been examples in their communities for sustainable school campuses and for that, they are all winners. Check out each schools individual summary [here](#).

Published by [Subaru Pacific](#)

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