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Trash-free lunch finalists

Redondo Beach's Washington Elementary School along with Lunada Bay Elementary and Riviera Elementary, were named finalists in the second L.A County Trash-Free Lunch Challenge. The contest, created by environmental non-profit Grades of Green and sponsored by the Sanitation Districts of L.A. County, teaches kids to reduce trash by using reusable lunch containers and by sorting compostable and recyclable materials, a release from Grades of Green said.

The three finalists were selected from a group of 17 entrants countrywide.

According to the release, a judging panel of five environmental experts will visit the three schools to select the winner on April 16. The winning school will be honored with a celebration on Earth Day on April 22. All three schools will receive grants from Chevron and the winning school will receive \$1,000.

The students are taught to reduce their trash by switching to reusable lunch containers and water bottles with cloth napkin. Those who buy lunch learned how to sort waste into both recycling and composting. Last year's competition reduced the participant's trash by an average of 70 percent and diverted more than 10,000 bags of refuse from landfills.

Chapman Elementary in Gardena and Silver Spur Elementary in Palos Verdes along with Beryl Heights Elementary in Redondo Beach were given special honors for their efforts and received \$450 in education grants.

Grace Robinson Chan, the Sanitation Districts' Chief Engineer and General Manager said in a release that all three finalists cut their trash destined for landfills by 90 percent on average, "which shows the astonishing potential for the program. It's teaching kids how to protect the environment now and in the years to come," Chan said.

"Once we show kids how simple and how important it is to reduce waste, they get excited about the difference they can make, and start new habits that will carry on with them for life," Lisa Coppedge, the Grades of Green Co-Founder and Director of Programs said. "Not only are they protecting the environment, they're saving money for both their parents and their schools."

Jefferson Elementary in Redondo Beach was presented with last year's \$1,000 grand prize by "Modern Family" star Nolan Gould.

Grades of Green is a non-profit organization that aims to inspire and empower students and the broader school community to care for the environment. Even though this year's challenge is nearly complete, any school may initiate the trash-free lunch program at any time. Visit www.gradesofgreen.org for more information. ER

