

GRADES OF GREEN

WASTE CAMPAIGN SPRING 2020

Final Report



The University of Buea team from Cameroon. Learn about their winning project on page nine.

www.gradesofgreen.org



Executive Summary

We are so incredibly proud of the 471 students who participated in the 2020 Waste Campaign! These students accomplished outstanding environmental change in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

As with everyone across the world, our student Eco-Leaders' lives were turned upside-down by the coronavirus pandemic. When schools closed their doors and shifted classes online, students had to overcome the many challenges of learning from home and a new routine, often while having to share technology and limited space with their families. Despite these difficulties, our Campaign teams showed just how much they care about the environment by continuing to work on their Grades of Green projects, often having to completely shift their plans from in-person action to online advocacy!

The Effect of the Coronavirus Pandemic on the 2020 Waste Campaign

In March when cities across the US began issuing Stay-at-Home orders, our Eco-Leaders were just beginning the fourth and final phase of their project in which they implement the environmental solution they've developed over the previous phases. Our staff advisors immediately recognized the need to adjust the program timeline and requirements to give our students ample opportunity to overcome challenges and update their projects so they could continue to work from home. We sought to mitigate the hardships and road blocks our teams might experience due to the coronavirus pandemic. We extended the program deadline from April 10 to May 15 and allowed teams to be eligible to win awards and Eco-Grants if they finished phase three, the planning and outreach portion of their project.

Completion Rate

Of the 46 teams that actively participated in our 2020 Waste Campaign program, 35 teams crossed the finish line, a 76% completion rate! Of those 35 finishing teams, 16 teams went above and beyond to complete the final implementation phase of their projects. Again, we can't express how proud we are of these students for continuing their Grades of Green projects. More than anything else, this is a testament to our student Eco-Leaders' dedication to caring for the environment!

Physical Impact

Every year, we're so excited to report the physical impact that our students have on our environment, detailing the tons of single-use plastics diverted from landfills, the hundreds of thousands of gallons of water conserved, and the environmentally-focused policy changes made at schools. The majority of our students' projects typically center around in-person action in their schools and communities, like implementing waste-reduction programs during school lunch, organizing community litter cleanups, or collecting compost. When schools closed down and gatherings were no longer safe, our students had to scrap their plans for these types of in-person actions. Because of this, the physical impact of the 2020 Waste Campaign was severely limited and isn't comparable in scope to our past campaigns. That said, many of our teams shifted their projects to focus on online advocacy. The following pages are full of their stories and the environmental impact they've had in their communities!

The Campaign Process

Before we get to our students' stories, we want to take a moment to explain how our campaigns work. Campaigns are deliberately structured to lead teams through the following process that is designed to help students develop powerful leadership skills while bringing about long-lasting environmental change.

1. Our students develop an environmentally-focused passion and are then guided to research how their passion is related to an environmental issue in their school or community.
2. Students then develop a solution to this issue using further research and our advisors' support.
3. Students champion their solution. They advocate for the implementation of their solution by drumming up support from their school and community, meeting with local leaders, and actively encouraging their peers, families, and communities to change their habits for the greener.
4. Finally, students bring their project to life by putting their solution into action and changing their local community significantly. Students then complete a final report which includes their project's measurable results, their challenges, successes, and plans to continue their project.

After completing the Campaign, truly exceptional teams are then chosen by a panel of environmental experts to **receive Eco-Grants of \$250, \$500, or \$1,000** to enable the students to expand the impact of their projects.

2020 Waste Campaign Scope

471 Eco-Leaders

16 US Cities

5 Countries

Completion Rate

46 Participating Student Teams

35 Teams continued their projects after Stay-at-Home orders were put in place in response to the coronavirus

A 76% Completion Rate!

Advocacy Outcomes

17,706

Community Members Reached

11,483

Students Reached

437

Advocacy Actions Taken, such as:

- Presentations to school districts
- City councils or school assemblies
- Letters to elected officials or business leaders
- Posters or signs posted
- Pledges or petitions created for the public
- And many more!

Habit Change and Waste Outcomes

As detailed in the Executive Summary, due to the closure of schools and the canceling of events caused by the coronavirus pandemic, our students weren't able to have as great of a physical impact as in our prior campaigns. Aside from the following profiles of our winners, find additional examples of how our students transitioned their projects to be online on page 10 of this report.

1,653

Total Pounds of Plastic Diverted

6,856

Number of Plastic Items Diverted, such as:

Single-use plastic water bottles, straws, utensils, plastic shopping bags, plastic baggies, produce bags, food packaging, etc.

Eco-Grant Winners

The following student teams were selected by an expert panel of judges to win Eco-Grants to advance their projects and expand their impact.

GRAND PRIZE ECO-GRANT WINNER - \$1,000

MARY BRAGG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Cerritos, California

This team consisted of fifty 4th and 5th graders who met before school to discuss solutions to reduce single-use water bottles in their community. They presented to their school's PTA, in classrooms, and at school assemblies, and then took it even further by hosting beach clean-ups to spread awareness and provide a way for people to take action to help the environment. On top of these efforts, the team started an advocacy campaign that encouraged all of their district's elementary schools to have their own Green Teams to engage in environmental action. With their strong drive and organizational skills, the Bragg team was able to do this all of this before the Stay-at-Home order was enacted. While they weren't able to present at their principal's meeting due to their school closing, they were able to continue inspiring others virtually.

The Bragg students' winning effort was featured in the [Los Cerritos Community News - click here to view the article](#).

Why does the Mary Bragg Team care? *"Our mission was to cut the number of single-use water bottles on our campus in half. We started by talking at a staff meeting to educate teachers about the danger of plastic water bottles. Now we are proud to say that all Mary Bragg teachers use reusable water bottles. We will still focus on reducing plastic. Our new mission is to focus on the number of plastic sporks."*



GREEN INFLUENCERS AWARD – \$500

HEAR Club from CAMS High School Carson, California

The “Human, Environmental, and Animal Rights Club” (HEAR Club) used their project to raise awareness of microplastics in synthetic clothing and the damage that they do to the environment. In addition to working for months to educate their fellow students about microplastics and how they could shop for sustainable fashion, the team also reached out to organizations that focused on microplastics reduction and conducted an interview with Grades of Green to further explain the issue, impacts, and potential solutions.



Read about the [HEAR Club's success in the Grunion Gazette!](#)

Why does the HEAR Club care? *“We learned through our research that microfibers contribute greatly to the plastic pollution issue. Microfibers even end up in our soil. This concerns us because not a lot of people are aware of where microfibers end up and how widespread this issue is. Everyone owns synthetic clothes without knowing the effects it has on plastic pollution.”*

BEST IMPACT BY AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL – \$500

Bryant Ranch Elementary Green Team Yorba Linda, California

Through the team’s participation in past Grades of Green programs, they knew the environmental problems caused by plastic bags and plastic baggies. When the Bryant Ranch team noticed that their school’s list of required supplies included plastic baggies, they knew they had a perfect project for the 2020 Waste Campaign. In addition to raising awareness of the problems caused by plastic baggies, the team worked with the school’s administration to reduce the number of baggies required which will reduce the use of approximately 40,000 baggies per year when the students return to school. It proves just how impactful even the youngest among us can be!



Why did Bryant Ranch deserve to win? *“Many of the students were willing to spend their own money to buy reusable bags for their classmates. As their adult representatives, we were extremely proud and grateful for these young kids who are so passionate about what they personally believe in...They are indeed ‘our future.’” - Adult Lead, Suzan C.*

BEST ALUMNI TEAM AWARD – \$250

Nathaniel Hawthorne Middle School 74

Queens, New York

This team of 10 students has previously worked with Grades of Green on several Campaign projects. Each year, we've been so impressed by the students' creativity and commitment to the environment. This semester, they continued to pursue water-bottle-waste reduction efforts at their own school before sharing their water-bottle upcycling methods to nearby elementary schools. The team then focused on recycling plastic markers at their school but switched their project to further educating their community about reducing plastic use after the Stay-at-Home Order was implemented.



What does the team plan to do with their eco-grant? *"We want to lessen the amount of plastic going into the landfills that end up in the ocean. It is important to keep the earth clean because it will all come back to us one day. With the eco-grant, (our) group can create more groups or start more programs to reduce single-use plastic. The more people that help with the project, the better the outcome will be."*

CAMPUS ADVOCATES AWARD – \$250

Keller Dual Language Middle School

Long Beach, California

This team encouraged the head of nutrition services at their school to replace the plastic-wrapped utensils served alongside lunch in their school. Their goal was to prove that using unwrapped utensils as an alternative would be more efficient, more cost-effective, and most importantly, more environmentally friendly. They hope to make these environmentally-conscious changes permanent.



Read about [Keller's success in the Grunion Gazette!](#)

Why do they care about fighting plastic pollution? *"Our teacher, Ms. Wasinger, was amazed by how many hours of personal time we gave to our project, at lunch and after school, and even during school-free days. We are passionate about plastic reduction as we live in a coastal city, where we see directly the consequence plastic has on our beaches."*

CAMPUS CHANGEMAKERS AWARD – \$250

Earth Savers Club from Thomas Starr King Middle School

Los Angeles, California

This very motivated team of 8th graders were working on a pilot program to reduce the number of plastic utensils used at school. Their ultimate goal is to present their findings to their principal and advocate for the replacement of plastic utensils with a compostable option. When the Stay-at-Home order was put into place, the team continued their research to find alternatives for plastic utensils and single-use trays.

Why is their project so important? *"We're part of the largest school system in California (LAUSD) and if we were to complete our project, there is a possibility that it could (be replicated at) other schools. In the past, our school has accomplished other things like getting rid of styrofoam trays, which did spread to all of LAUSD."*



MOST INSPIRATIONAL TEAM AWARD – \$250

Whittier Elementary School

Long Beach, California

The young Eco-Leaders at Whittier Elementary – who call themselves the “Wolf Pack” after learning about how the reintroduction of wolves can benefit the environment – focused on reducing litter on campus. They educated their school through videos about the harmful effects of litter and showcased how cleaning up was every student’s responsibility. They worked with their principal and teachers to set up “beautification zones” and organized their fellow students into groups to help clean up their school’s grounds.

Read about [Whittier's success in the Grunion Gazette!](#)

How has the campaign taught you to be better leaders? *"As leaders, we had to stand in front of the classroom to give our presentation. It took courage to give our presentations because it wasn't always easy. It is not easy to present to our peers. We are proud of how much we were able to accomplish even though the Wolf Pack only got to meet every other week!"*



INTERNATIONAL CHANGEMAKERS AWARD – \$500

University of Buea

Buea, Cameroon

This team in Cameroon advocated to their University administration to stop the open burning of trash on campus and encouraged their university body to seek out trash collection services and trash bin sites. During this process, they worked to create a university recycling program while educating younger students and siblings about waste issues occurring in their community.

The team leader, Forbi Perise, [recently spoke to the UN as part of the World Oceans Day](#) global virtual event. Watch his presentation and panel discussion to learn more!



What's at stake? *"The Grades of Green Waste Campaign is important to us because we have an enormous plastic pollution problem...we also have an issue of littering due to insufficient trash bins on campus, and in addition to this the waste is burned in open pits around campus...Our goal is to put in place a waste diversion and reduction program on campus by engaging the entire campus community in contributing to a tangible sustainability goal."*

BEST STUDENT LEADER

Samantha T - Mira Costa High School

Manhattan Beach, California

Samantha is an 11th-grade student at Mira Costa High School in Manhattan Beach. She has been involved in Grades of Green since 2012, bringing energy and passion to all of the environmental projects she has taken on over the years. Sam began with the Grades of Green Youth Corps Eco Leadership program in 2012 when she was in 3rd grade, leading environmental education and recycling projects in her community. Sam started the first student-led Grades of Green club at Mira Costa, spearheading solutions to environmental problems in her high school and city. She and her team began participating in the Campaign program in 2018 focusing on educating her community about ocean health and leading projects to reduce plastic litter at the beach. Sam is a strong environmental advocate in her community and is consistently involved in environmental leadership and speaking out for green solutions.



BEST STUDENT INNOVATOR

Sacha E - Granada Hills High School Habit Change Team

Los Angeles, California

Sacha is a student at Granada Hills Charter High school. He is interested in taking environmental action because of the amount of waste and pollution in his community. The strong winds in the local neighborhoods constantly knock down trash cans and spill trash into the environment. Sasha's project addresses this issue by using an innovative system of automatic electromagnetic locks that automatically secure trash cans if they are knocked over. This invention has been recognized as the most sustainable invention at the MIT EurekaFest. Sasha is also encouraging people to stop overfilling trashcans, so that trash can lids can be secured properly, further preventing litter in his community. His project demonstrates the power of innovative ideas and creative thinking when approaching environmental problems.

Student Leaders Pivot their Projects in Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic

Mira Costa Students Turn a Paddle Board Cleanup into an Instagram Contest

You've already met our student leader Sam T, the winner of our Best Student Leader Award. Her team at Mira Costa High School in Manhattan Beach, California, were planning an innovative community litter cleanup event: the public would jump on paddle boards to clean up a harbor near their school. Because of the coronavirus, her team had to cancel the event. Instead, the team ran a successful Instagram campaign that challenged their classmates and the public to post photos of themselves picking up litter and then challenging others to do the same.

Culver City Middle School Students Make a Virtual Presentation to the City Council

A student team from Culver City Middle School in California had been working hard to put together a presentation for the City Council in support of a proposal to reduce the use of plastic containers, take-out bags, and other single-use plastics in the city. After working closely with the city leaders who championed the proposal, the student team created a compelling presentation filled with facts and details. They were ready to present when the coronavirus pushed all the City Council meetings online. Not to be deterred, the Culver City Middle School team pivoted and recorded their presentation individually, put the pieces together and were able to present the video to the City Council in an online format.

Discovery Woods Student Go from Lunch Waste Audits to Digital Advocacy

The students at Discovery Woods wanted to help their school reduce plastic use during lunch and were planning several lunchtime waste audits to measure the impact of their education efforts. These audits are a lot of work: students have to survey a sample of trash to determine how much is produced and what kinds of trash and recyclables are collected. Once their school closed because of the coronavirus, their waste audit plans were put on hold. Instead of giving up, the team designed and distributed a detailed flyer promoting the use of reusable products.

Waste Campaign 2020 Sponsors THANK YOU



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3rd District Supervisor, Shelia Kuehl
2nd District Supervisor, Mark Ridley-Thomas



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Waste Campaign Judges THANK YOU

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- Craig W. Cadwallader** Surfrider Foundation
- Stephanie Cochrane** Owner, The Waste Less Shop
- Emily Gee** Marketing and Communications Manager, AeroFarms
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