

# Zero Waste School Event Guide



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Transform Your Next School Event into a Fun and Eco-Friendly Experience.

- Opt for a zero-waste approach to make school picnics, festivals, sports events, graduation parties, meetings, and more environmentally friendly with proper planning.
- Zero waste events at school provide excellent teaching moments on sustainable practices.
- Zero waste, as defined by the Zero Waste International Alliance, focuses on responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery without harming the environment or human health.
- Embrace the 5 Rs to achieve zero waste: Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rot (Compost).
- Prioritize rethinking, reducing, and reusing to prevent waste creation before resorting to recycling and composting.



## VOLUNTEERS

Plan ahead and consider the volunteer roles needed in advance, allowing ample time for recruitment. Depending on the event, volunteers may be required to:

- Monitor sorting stations and assist guests in sorting waste into recycling, compost, and landfill.
- Provide or procure reusable, recyclable, or compostable foodware and other items.
- Select food options that reduce waste.
- Clean and store reusable items post-event.
- Collaborate with the school custodian to arrange sorting station bins and ensure proper disposal of sorted materials.
- For larger or more intricate events, appointing a zero waste coordinator can be beneficial to supervise waste reduction efforts and delegate tasks to volunteers.

## EVENT PROMOTION

Make sure to highlight the zero-waste theme of the event in advance to notify guests and give them time to get ready. For example, if you expect guests to bring reusable items such as water bottles, mention it in your event promotions. Using digital promotion instead of printed invites or flyers is another great way to reduce waste.



ZERO WASTE

## PREPARE TO RECYCLE & COMPOST

Get to know the recycling and composting options available at your school. Ask the school custodian for recycling and compost containers, if needed, and coordinate the setup and removal details. Label the sorting station bins with signs to guide visitors on proper disposal. For sample signs you can download, check out [www.sdusdsustainability.com/copy-of-resources-1](http://www.sdusdsustainability.com/copy-of-resources-1)



## FOOD

The types of food served and their packaging can greatly affect the waste produced at your event. Here are some easy ways to decrease or eliminate a significant amount of this waste:

- Opt for foods that don't require utensils.
- Buy food in bulk instead of individual portions to reduce packaging.
- Utilize a [food waste reduction calculator](#) to determine the right amount to serve and minimize waste.
- Select foods with minimal or no packaging.
- Use large reusable pitchers or water coolers to refill water bottles or eco-friendly cups instead of buying single-use water bottles or juice boxes.



## FOODWARE

Opt for reusable foodware for both eating and serving whenever feasible:

- Acquire a collection of reusable dishes (plates, cups, utensils) for school functions and appoint a volunteer to clean them afterward.
- Consult with the school principal or local public health department to understand the protocols for washing the foodware.
- Alternatively, suggest that attendees bring their own water bottles, utensils, and plates to the gathering.
- If guests are contributing food, encourage them to bring their dishes in reusable containers.





To minimize environmental impact when reusable dishes are not an option:

- Purchase recyclable, compostable, or recycled items
- Avoid plastic and polystyrene products
- Opt for paper plates over plastic
- Check for certified compostable products if composting - Note: Local composting facilities do NOT accept compostable products
- Use clear cups labeled with a #1 recycling symbol
- Provide a marker for guests to label disposable cups
- Avoid offering straws and sauce packets - they create unnecessary waste



## DECORATIONS AND OTHER PARTY NEEDS

- Utilize reusable tablecloths and assign a volunteer to wash them post-event.
- Opt for lasting decorations like fabric banners instead of disposable ones like balloons. These can be reused for upcoming school functions.
- Create seasonal table ornaments using real plants, flowers, or natural items to add a festive touch.
- Explore alternatives to disposable prizes & party favors, such as:
  - Tokens for selecting a schoolwide activity
  - Punch cards to earn a prize at the event's end
  - Gift certificates for local experiences like restaurants or movie theaters
  - Rewards like homework passes or extra recess
  - Fun activities like a pajama party or in-class movie
  - Special events like lunch with the principal or a teacher
  - Environmentally friendly options such as reusable utensil sets or water bottles for zero waste lunches.





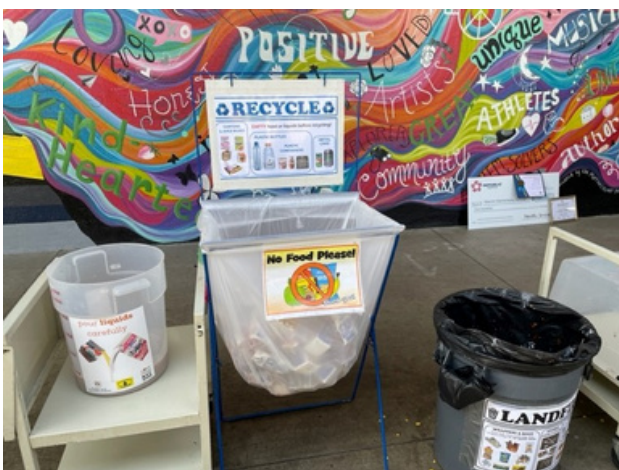


## Day of the Event

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### SORTING STATIONS WITH COMPOSTING & RECYCLING

- Arrange one or more sorting stations with clearly labeled signs. Downloadable signs are available at [www.sdu.sustainability.com/copy-of-resources-1](http://www.sdu.sustainability.com/copy-of-resources-1) for sorting categories: Liquids, Recycling, Landfill, and Compost. Note that these signs are just examples, as acceptable items for recycling and composting may differ between schools.
- Place the signs above the bins at eye level for easy visibility.
- Consider attaching actual items (such as paper napkins and recyclable bottles) to the corresponding signs.



- Remove or cover any additional landfill bins not part of the sorting station to prevent confusion.
- For onsite food preparation, provide recycling and composting containers for the cooks.
- Display signs indicating the event is zero waste and the location of the sorting station.
- Train volunteer sorting station monitors and ensure there is always someone available to assist guests with proper sorting.
- Capture images of the sorting station(s) and other zero waste initiatives in progress.

## After the Event

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### WASTE CHECK

- Check the bins for any contamination and segregate any contaminated items found.
- To understand the impact of your efforts, you can weigh or count the bags from various waste streams (landfill, recycling, compost). Additionally, document all the different measures taken to work towards zero waste, including reduction and reuse.
- Dispose of the separated waste in the correct outdoor bins or make arrangements for the custodian to manage it.

### FOOD

- Send guests home with any uneaten leftovers or packaged foods.
- Consider donating any leftover packaged food to a shelter or food bank.



### REFLECT

- Identify successful aspects.
- Explore opportunities for improvement in the future.
- Review the feedback received from guests.
- Share the quantity (in pounds or bags) of waste diverted from the landfill and showcase additional achievements in zero waste from the event.