

reduce,
reuse,
recycle

waste-free & boomerang lunches

Introduction |



The new School Re-Entry Plan states that staff and students will be required to pack in and pack out all food each day. This is essentially the same as the boomerang lunch program described below.

School lunches can generate a lot of waste. Cutting back on food waste and single-use packaging can have a big impact on the environment.

According to the Recycling Council of Ontario, *“the average student’s school lunch creates about 30 kilograms of waste per year”*. This means the average CBE elementary school can produce over 11,850 kilograms of waste every year just from student lunches.

Waste-free lunches are less expensive. The Recycling Council of Ontario estimates that: *“a lunch that contains processed, pre-packaged foods costs about \$4.50, while the average waste-free lunch can cost as little as \$2.50. Packing a waste-free lunch every school day can save over \$360 per year”*.

- **What is a waste-free lunch?** A waste-free lunch contains no disposable or throwaway packaging. Pack drinks and food into reusable food and drink containers, then place within a reusable lunch bag or box. This method favours reusable food and drink containers, washable cutlery and cloth napkins. All containers are re-sealable so that leftover food and drink can be consumed (or composted) later. (Recycling Council of Alberta)
- **What is a boomerang lunch?** A boomerang lunch is a program where students are asked to bring all the waste home from their lunches. This includes all packaging and food waste. The purpose of a boomerang lunch is not to transfer waste disposal from the school to home, but to provide parents with first hand knowledge of the eating habits and preferences of their children. School staff see a huge amount of uneaten food go into the garbage day after day. This is not only wasteful but also expensive.

Program |

Step 1 | Establish a team to lead this program

This team should represent your whole school community. Your team should include, an administrator, teacher(s), parents, students, facility operator(s), and lunch room supervisor(s)

If you already have an environment club in place at your school, then this process can be an expansion of that team.

Step 2 | Baseline analysis

Review your school's current performance. The data that you collect will give your school an idea of the amount and type of lunch waste generated that way you have a means of evaluating progress and success.

Possible option for data collection;

- Ask your school Facility Operator to count the number of bags of lunch waste per day or per week.

Step 3 | Program – Tips

How to reduce packaging?

- Bulk Up! Buy food that is not over packaged such as dried fruit or trail mix. Another example is to buy the larger yogurt containers and put an individual portion into a re-sealable container.
- Natures Packaging – Oranges, bananas, apples and hard-boiled eggs come with their own packaging. For younger students cut fruits and vegetables up. Cutting and peeling fruits and vegetables make it easier for younger students to eat them in a short eating time.

Use permanent packaging!

- Reusable lunch bag or box
- Insulated flasks such as a Thermos™
- Reusable water bottles

- Reusable plastic or metal containers
- Cloth napkins
- Reusable utensils

Only pack as much food as your child will eat. Remind students to check with their parents before eating left over food from their lunches!



Communication Plan |

Does everyone know about the process?
How will you ensure that everyone knows about the process?

Ideas | Announcements, assembly, newsletter, posters, etc.

Step 4 | Measuring, evaluating, and celebrating!

- Measure progress using baseline numbers.
- Evaluate effectiveness of process.
- Celebrate success!

Resources |

Waste-Free Lunches Challenge – Teachers Planning Guide

<https://recycle.ab.ca/resources/for-teachers/WFLC-Program-Details-1.pdf>

Food Matters Action Kit

<http://www.cec.org/flwy/>

Questions | Contact

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