

# Advocating for Recycling

## Actions Students Can Take at School

You are tomorrow's leaders and play an important role in making recycling work. Recycling helps conserve natural resources, reduce landfill waste, and give materials a second life. Recycling only works when materials are sorted correctly. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation created this guide to help you take action at school by improving recycling habits, educating others, and strengthening your school's recycling system.



### Supporter—Beginner Actions

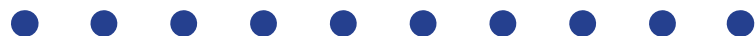
*These are actions you can take as an individual or with a school environmental club.*

- **Conduct Recycling Bin Observations:** Observe how students and staff use recycling bins during lunch or between classes. Check to see if the right items are going in the bin or if people are confused. Write down the patterns and discuss what might make recycling easier at your school.
- **Have Your School Acknowledge New York Recycles Day/America Recycles Day:** Work with your school to recognize the day (November 15) with announcements, themed dress days, or lunchtime activities. Even small recognition builds awareness and shows that recycling matters.
- **Become a Recycling Myth-Buster:** Create short announcements or posters that correct common recycling myths. Focus on what your local recycling program accepts so people don't put the wrong items in the bin.
- **Organize a Poster and Flyer Campaign:** Educate your peers and teachers through a poster and flyer campaign on how to recycle more and reduce waste at school. Focus on putting posters in relevant places like hallways, classrooms, and lunchrooms. If your school has an electronic bulletin board, the campaign can be displayed digitally.

### Advocate—Intermediate Actions

*These are actions you can take with a school environmental club or teacher.*

- **Host an Event or Education Campaign During New York Recycles Day and/or Earth Week:** Examples of recycling-related events could be trivia contests, a deposit container fund drive, a recycling relay race, informational booths, or a recycling pledge wall to commit to better recycling habits.
- **Participate in the New York Recycles! Poster Contest:** Work with your art teacher to enter into the New York Recycles! Poster Contest ([www.nysar3.org/page/nyrecycles-calendar-artwork-contest-76.html](http://www.nysar3.org/page/nyrecycles-calendar-artwork-contest-76.html)). Winners will have their artwork featured in the annual New York Recycles! Calendar, receive a framed copy of their winning poster, and get an invitation to speak about their poster at the New York State Association of Reduction, Reuse and Recycling Annual Conference.
- **Host a Documentary Screening:** Host a screening of a waste reduction and recycling documentary. The screening could be done as part of a class, club meeting, or community event at your school.
- **Conduct a Waste Audit:** Run an audit in your school to quantify the amount of recyclable materials being thrown away or how much trash is in recycling bins. Work with the custodial staff or your club advisor to figure out the logistics (i.e., timing, equipment needed, etc.) of a waste audit at your school.



- **Go on a Recycling-Related Field Trip:** Organize a class or club trip to see a recycling operation in action. Visit a recycling facility or a transfer station to see what happens after materials leave your school. Understanding the process helps students see why proper sorting matters and that recycling works!
- **Lead a Recycling Behavior Survey:** Survey students and staff to learn what confuses them about recycling. Use the results to design better signage or education efforts.



## Champion—Advanced Actions

*These are actions you can take with a school environmental club, teacher, administrator, or community partner.*

- **Write a Recycling Improvement Proposal:** Use data from your recycling bin observations or waste audit to write a formal proposal recommending improvements for your school's recycling system. This could include better bin placement, standardized signage, student recycling monitors, or changes to school purchasing.
- **Start a Student Recycling Ambassador Program:** Train a small group of students to help others sort materials correctly during lunch or school events. Ambassadors educate and guide peers in a supportive way.
- **Organize a Recycling Expo/Community Night:** Host a school event where local recyclers, waste haulers, or environmental groups can table and answer questions to connect students to real-world recycling systems.

If you have questions or are looking to connect with other K-12 schools, email [Recycling@dec.ny.gov](mailto:Recycling@dec.ny.gov).

