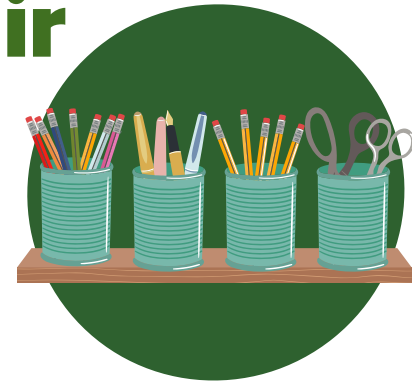


Reduce, Reuse, and Repair

Actions Students Can Take at School

You are tomorrow's leaders and have the power to shape a more sustainable future. By reducing waste, reusing materials, and repairing items instead of replacing them, you can help conserve natural resources, save energy, and reduce pollution. This The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation created this guide to help you identify actions you can take at school to prevent waste before it starts, find creative ways to reuse materials, and fix items so they last longer.



Supporter—Beginner Actions

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

- **Use the Morning Announcements:** Share one quick waste reduction tip during the morning announcements each week. These reminders help students and staff build better habits over time. Examples include using both sides of paper, bringing reusable water bottles, packing lunches in reusable containers, or bringing your own reusable utensils (such as spoons and forks) to lunch. More ideas can be found on Cafeteria Culture's "Plastic Free Lunch Day" toolkit (cafeteriaculture.org/toolkit/plastic-free-lunch-day).
- **Organize a Poster and Flyer Campaign:** Educate your peers and teachers through a poster and flyer campaign on how to reuse 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.
- **Create an Art Project (Class or Contest):** Use scrap paper, cardboard, or packaging to upcycle materials. This can be done as a classroom project or a school-wide contest. The goal is to show that materials that seem to be at the end of their useful life still have value and creative potential.
- **Start a "Pause Before You Toss" Campaign:** Encourage students to pause for 10 seconds before throwing away an item and ask a few questions: Did you need this item? Are there creative ways to reduce this waste in the future? The pause can help create awareness of material use habits over time.

Advocate—Intermediate Actions

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

- **Try a One-Day Paper Detox:** Challenge classes to try to go one full day without using new paper. Students can use digital tools, whiteboards, or scrap paper instead. Reflect on what was easy, what was hard, and how paper use could be reduced long-term.
- **Become a Packaging Detective:** Investigate which school supplies, lunches, or deliveries come with packaging. Document your findings and brainstorm ways to reduce packaging, such as buying in bulk or choosing reusable alternatives.
- **Read Waste Reduction-Related Books to Younger Students:** Help educate younger students at your school by hosting a waste reduction-related book reading as part of a class or club. For example, middle and high school students could pick a fun, waste reduction-related book and read it to kindergarteners or first graders.

Champion—Advanced Actions

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

- ❑ **Pitch a Waste Prevention Policy:** Research waste issues at your school and develop a proposal to prevent waste at its source. This might include reducing single-use items, replacing single-use items with reusable ones, installing water refill stations, changing purchasing practices, or updating event guidelines. You should then present your ideas to the school administrators. (Note: Talking to custodial staff to hear their perspectives and experiences can be very helpful.)
- ❑ **Launch a Waste Reduction Pilot:** Run a trial on one waste reduction idea with your class to see what actually works for you and your peers. Pilots help you make informed decisions before expanding to a school-wide program.
- ❑ **Organize a Repair Event:** Host a repair event at your school where students, families, and staff can bring broken items to be fixed. This could include clothing, backpacks, jewelry, or other household items. Partner with teachers, parents, and community volunteers to help guide simple repairs.
- ❑ **Set Up a Little Free Library:** Start a Little Free Library at your school to encourage book sharing. Students can help build, decorate, and maintain the library. It can be placed outside the school in high-foot-traffic areas (with permission).

If you have questions or are looking to connect with other K-12 schools, email Recycling@dec.ny.gov.

