

## Michigan Junior Master Composter (JMC) Case Study Series From Washtenaw County Area Schools

### School Zero Waste Lunchroom using municipal food waste collection pickups and additional outdoor composting areas

**Where:** Ann Arbor STEAM, (formerly Northside School) 912 Barton Drive, Ann Arbor, is a magnet K-5 STEAM (Science Technology, Engineering, Art, Math concentration) school, opened in 2014/15 with ~ 300 students. The school is expanding over the next few years to accommodate K-8 with a new building addition. <http://www.a2schools.org/Domain/13>

**Food waste composting snapshot:** Fourth grade teacher Jean Wilson oversees the lunchroom zero waste program, which uses the weekly municipal compost cart pickup program to handle all plate food scrapings from April 1-mid December (details at [www.a2gov.org/compost](http://www.a2gov.org/compost)). During Jan-Feb-Mar only fruit and vegetable wastes are collected and handled in a plastic compost tumbler bin and an underground worm bin.



**Zero waste lunchroom details:** There are two student-staffed waste sorting stations in the middle of the lunchroom. Students empty their lunch trays or home lunch bags into labeled bins for:

- FOOD SCRAPS\*
- RECYCLABLES (empty beverage containers, empty paper lunch bags) are placed in recycling bin lined with a clear plastic bag
- TRASH (plastic bags, containers with liquids, candy wrappers, etc.) are put in a plastic-bag lined trash can and taken to the school dumpster by the custodian.
- FOAM TRAYS (stacked in a clear 33-gallon plastic bag) are recycled via the AAPS food service contractor.



\*The food scraps are placed into a brown paper bag-lined 13-gallon bin. At the end of the last lunchroom shift, two students take the paper compost bags to one of the two the 64-gallon compost carts stored at the side of the school near the dumpsters. Once/week the

students roll the two carts to the curb for municipal pickup from April 1- Dec 15. From Jan to March, the produce scraps are placed in an outdoor composting bin.

**Zero waste lunchroom details:** The food waste sorting supplies are stored under the central table in two identical plastic boxes, which include a 13-gallon collection bin, brown paper bag liners, and a clipboard with weekly printout of student volunteer responsibilities and daily names. The trash and recycling containers are emptied and maintained by school custodial staff.



**Volunteer recruitment and tasks.** The school rotates during lunchtime with grades K-3 on recess (outdoors or in the gym) while grades 4-5 eat in the lunchroom. Then the two groups switch activities and locations. Students (two from each of a 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom) volunteer during their lunchroom time and oversee the zero waste stations while their peers are in the lunchroom. The names of the student volunteers for each day of the week are listed on a sheet that is posted in the two classrooms. The names are also written on a sheet stored on a clipboard in the zero waste supplies bin. This sheet includes a checklist with the volunteer duties to: set up the zero waste stations; assist students with sorting recyclables, compost, trash; take the paper bags of food waste to the outside collection carts; sign the clipboard log sheet; and put away the supplies for the next school day. Although the student volunteers work in teams of two for each rotation, Ms Miller found that making ONE student in charge of each daily shift helped increase the accountability and quality of the volunteer effort. The student “supervisor” could also be easily contacted if there were any questions or updates to the zero waste lunchroom programs.

**Metrics/waste diversion:** Students and staff collect ~ 10 pounds/day (50 pounds/week) of lunchroom food scraps as well as from several participating classrooms. [These weights have not been confirmed.](#)



**Tips:**

1. Two 64-gallon municipal compost carts were purchased by the PTO @ \$25 from the city for handling all plate scrapings from April 1 to Dec. 15. (The school initially used one 96-gallon compost cart, but it was too large and heavy for the students to manage, so two, 64-gallon carts were acquired.)
2. Since the city’s food waste pickups are suspended during the winter months, the school needs a way to handle food scraps from mid-Dec to April 1.
3. During the winter months, the fruit and vegetable scraps are collected to compost

in an outdoor 0.5 cubic yard plastic compost bin. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade students manage the compost bin, in which the food scraps are mixed with brown leaves, soil, and watered in the spring, when the materials are no longer frozen.

4. The school may look into taking vegetative food scraps to the nearby Leslie Science & Nature Center and use the large in-ground red worm bin at Project Grow’s Compost Education Center, <http://www.projectgrowgardens.org/cec>.
5. Ms. Wilson’s class also reclaimed and mulched a traffic island on the school parking lot to host a small, underground red worm bin at the top and science unit plantings around the parameter.
6. The lead teacher for the composting and zero waste lunchroom program is 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Jean Wilson [wilsonje@aaps.k12.mi.us](mailto:wilsonje@aaps.k12.mi.us) and blog <http://wilson4a2steam.blogspot.com> (for ideas and links for creative food nutrition, food web, composting, etc.) # # #