



# Educating Parents on How to Pack a Waste-Free Lunch

Parents who send lunch from home play a very important role in helping to reduce waste in school lunchrooms.



A waste-free lunch is a meal that does not end up in the trash. Parents can buy food items in bulk and then put them in reusable containers for their children.

*Example:* Use a reusable lunch box or bag and fill it with a lunch in reusable containers. A cloth napkin could also be included. It can then be brought home, washed and used again.

*Benefits:* Less waste is created by using washable containers to pack a lunch. Packing food in reusables is typically less expensive than buying food that comes in disposable containers.

## Zero Waste Lunch

Fostering school-wide “zero waste” lunch days not only helps to reduce waste but it also sets up a waste reduction mindset in parents, students and staff. Start with one day a week and expand gradually to include every day. Provide information to students and parents about eliminating packaged lunch items. Encourage the use of reusable sandwich and snack containers, and lunch boxes. (North East Recycling Council, 2011)



## Smart Lunches

· Have little or no disposable material such as cling wrap, individual packaging, baggies, and candy wrappers.

- Use reusable containers such as Tupperware or Rubbermaid type containers for sandwiches and snacks
- Use reusable containers rather than disposable packaging for bulk items such chips, applesauce, and yogurt
- Check lunches regularly, give students a special stamp if they have a “smart lunch” containing one or fewer pieces of trash. Talk to teachers, students and parents about the importance of sorting waste, and packing “trash free lunches” (lunchbox instead of sack, reusable containers instead of baggies, thermoses instead of juice boxes).

## What schools are doing

### Carondelet Catholic School - Minneapolis

Has a parent recycling coordinator who works with the Trash Slasher Committee. The Trash Slashers are three teachers from each campus committed to reducing waste at the school. A key factor in Carondelet's program was a zero waste campaign called “Let's Slash Our Trash!” Parents and children are educated on S.M.A.R.T (Save Money and Reduce Trash) lunches, encouraged to use reusable containers and avoid single serve wrappings. The end goal is to have as close to a zero waste lunchroom as possible.

Kindergarten students have a special lesson on SMART Lunches and can earn a smiley face stamp if they have a SMART lunch (one or fewer pieces of trash). The young students are very motivated to get that smiley face!



### Sibley Elementary School - Northfield

An adult committee of teachers (the “Green Team”) meets monthly to discuss strategies for making Sibley Elementary School a more environmental school. Lunchroom waste often comes up as an area of focus. Because each grade level is represented on the



Green Team, we are able to effectively talk to other teachers, students and parents about the importance of sorting waste, and packing “trash free lunches” (lunchbox instead of sack, Tupperware instead of baggies, thermoses instead of juice boxes). Students receive a special stamp if they have a “smart lunch” containing one or fewer pieces of trash.

## Resources

### ***Waste Free Lunches***

<http://www.wastefreelunches.org/success.html>

### ***Waste Free Lunch Day***

<http://library.thinkquest.org/06aug/00442/wastefreelunch.htm>

### ***No Waste Lunch***

<http://www.reduce.org/school/index.html>