

Sequoia Elementary Food Scrap Heroes

Written by Nate Ivy

Monday, 27 February 2012 16:48 - Last Updated Monday, 27 February 2012 17:04

4Rs Action Hero Spotlight

How can students be heroes and take action to start a food scrap recycling program at their school? One class and one teacher at Sequoia Elementary School in Oakland can tell you how! Ms. Barbara Schmidt's 5th grade class, in collaboration with her partner teacher Mr. Sonny Kim's 5th grade class, participated in the 4Rs Student Action Project: the 4Rs & Our Foodshed. After investigating their lunch waste, students took action to help launch Sequoia's Food Scrap Recycling program at breakfast, lunch, and afterschool.

Students took action and authored scripts, and gave schoolwide presentations on how Sequoia students could sort their lunch waste properly and reduce their school waste. They also created and posted educational posters, and became food scrap monitors during their lunchtime.



How does Sequoia monitor lunch waste during the lower elementary lunchtime?

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Train them, of course! In addition to the 5th grade food scrap monitors, Barbara's class is also training first and second grade students to become food scrap monitors, and yes, even Kindergarteners! Barbara said that they are doing a "stellar job".

How can students take this message home?

5th grade Food Scrap Monitor, James Montoya has a few solutions on how to organize food scraps, and a tip for those families that don't have green waste service, "In our house, we got a little bucket and we then put [food scraps] in the green bin ...not everyone has a compost bin, but they can do it on their own and make a worm bin".

When asked, if this project was making a difference, James responded, "We're making a difference. When the little kids go home, even if their parents make a mistake, they can tell their parents instead of just putting everything in the landfill, they can tell them 'this goes there and this goes there', and we are actually reducing the landfill".

Even with the leadership and dedication of Barbara and her students, it takes a village to do this kind of work. In collaboration with their custodian, Mr. Ron, StopWaste.Org 4Rs Educators, Nancy Deming, the Oakland Unified School District Sustainability Coordinator, her student teacher Jessie Poggi, their principal Katia Hazen, Sequoia's lunchroom staff, and Rebecca Parnes, from Waste Management, students were able to help make this project happen.

As the program launched in October 2011, Barbara continues to support food scrap recycling at the school as well as incorporating nutritional and ecological themes in her science and social studies units.

"Thanks for the support you've given all of us in Room 13. Without you, your team, and Nancy, all my colleagues, I would have a difficult time putting this all together. I'm also grateful to my students who have put so much effort into supporting our project. It is wonderful to watch how they have become true leaders at our school."

And, thank you, Barbara, for taking action to meaningfully stop waste in Oakland and beyond!

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