Planning Your Reuse/Cleanout Day in Five Steps

For most students, cleaning out their desk or locker is a much-anticipated event signaling the end of the school year and the start of summer. In their haste to leave school, students, faculty and staff can end up throwing away materials that could be recycled or reused. With planning, a locker or desk cleanout event can become an environmentally responsible learning opportunity for all!

The following timeline is a guideline for when to start planning and implementing your school's reuse/cleanout day activities. Whether it's a day- or week-long event, make sure you're prepared and have all the logistics in place.

Step 1: I need a hero

Fall/Winter

First, you need a recycling champion to lead the reuse/cleanout day effort. Recycling programs do best when school leadership is involved, but your day can be led by facilities management, building operations, custodian staff, the student council, faculty or the Parent Teacher Organization.

The champion will lead the effort in making a basic plan that should include:

- ☐ Principal support.
  - Advise your school's administration of your plan and timeline to gain their support and input.
  - Adjust next year's back-to-school supply list depending on items saved.
- ☐ Informed teachers.
  - Gain their support in teaching students that reusing and recycling are preferable to disposing of things in the trash.
  - Provide the opportunity for teachers to collect classroom supplies for next year.
- ☐ Custodian input and buy-in.
- ☐ Collection bins for reusable items and additional containers for recyclables.

Don't forget, every hero needs a sidekick! Contact your county to see what resources are available to you.

Step 2: Study-up on logistics

Late March

After obtaining support and advice from school administration about who should be involved in your reuse/cleanout day, start your planning efforts in late March.

- ☐ Meet with head custodians to get their advice on the logistics of your school's reuse/cleanout day.
- ☐ Arrange for increased recycling services, if necessary.
- ☐ Setting the date or dates for lockers and desks must be cleaned out by and when your reuse/cleanout day(s) will take place, coinciding with when students are scheduled to clean out their lockers and desks.
- ☐ Determining what collection equipment is needed for recycling and reusables and how you'll secure it.
- ☐ Mapping out where and how many sorting stations will be placed throughout the school.
  - Plan on approximately one station per 150 lockers.
- ☐ Determining how to recruit volunteers and helpers. Students can assist, but there needs to be at least one adult per sorting station. Consider tapping into your parent groups, rotary clubs, or service groups, or see if your county as a Master Recycler/Composter program or other waste reduction or recycling staff or programs that could help.
- ☐ Determining what help custodial staff may need to place and retrieve bins where collected reusables will end up and how they will get there.

Step 3: Extra, extra! Get the word out

Early April

Now that you've locked in the date and time, make sure everyone is prepared for and made aware of your upcoming reuse/cleanout day. Whenever possible, use electronic communications to reduce your paper consumption.

- ☐ Make announcements and notify teachers, staff and students about the upcoming reuse/cleanout day, including details like what is happening, where sorting stations will be, and how to determine if items are reusable.
- ☐ Offer notices or posters that can be shared with students about the upcoming reuse/cleanout day. Include your green team or other club that can help hang posters and talk to students.
- ☐ Ask for interested teachers to volunteer to establish the process for how to distribute the reused goods collected. Consider a Teacher Resource Zone or other space where supplies are kept. After meeting and developing this process, share it with all teachers.
- ☐ Ask teachers, staff or adult volunteers to help at the collection stations to ensure students place their items in the proper containers.

Step 4: P is for Preparation

Late April

Lock the details into place before your reuse/cleanout day.

- ☐ Contact your school's hauler at least three weeks in advance to discuss the need for extra recycling pick-ups and the timing of these pick-ups.
- ☐ Develop a to-do list for the days immediately preceding your reuse/cleanout day and the necessary steps to follow to distribute items for reuse. This should include setting up your collection stations and other set-up needs within the building.
- ☐ Label the tops and sides of collection containers and put up signs around the collection stations. Images of the supplies on the label make it easier for students and teachers to guide what materials belong in which bins.
  - ○ Your county recycling program may have labels or other resources.
  - ○ Some images are available for you, contact your local county recycling department.
  - ○ Recruit volunteers to label collection bins and stations a few days before your reuse/cleanout day.
  - ○ Send out reminders to teachers to tell their students the reuse/cleanout day is coming up. These reminders should include:
  - ○ A list of recyclable items, which could include, but is not limited to used: paper (notebooks, folders, magazines), cardboard, empty bottles, cans.
  - ○ A list of reusable items, which could include, but is not limited to unused: paper (notebooks or folders), school supplies (pencils, crayons, pens, markers, glue, scissors, staplers, rulers, binders), lightly used clothing. Remember to emphasize materials must be gently used, e.g., notebooks that are only half-used, or markers and pens that still have ink in them.

Step 5: Being green is classy

Early May

Make sure to follow up on all your prior planning as your reuse/cleanout day arrives.

- [ ] Distribute reusable goods to teachers or other related programs. Contact your county for more detailed information, but general end locations for reusable items may include:
  - Notebooks, folders, binders, pencils, crayons, pens, markers and other school supplies can be kept at school or donated to an after-school programs.
  - Lightly used clothing can go to a thrift store or homeless shelter.
  - Miscellaneous items can go to thrift stores or other donation-based services.

How can we help?

For more detailed information and resources, call your county or visit their website.

Anoka County

Grants, technical assistance, labels.
763-324-3400
www.anokacounty.us
Search: school recycling

Carver County

Bins for sorting (all counties can borrow), grants, technical assistance, labels.
952-361-1800
www.co.carver.mn.us
Search: recycling

Dakota County

Technical assistance, labels, bins.
952-891-7557
www.dakotacounty.us
Search: school recycling

Hennepin County

Grants, technical assistance, labels.
612-348-3777
www.hennepin.us/schoolrecycling

Ramsey County

Labels, bins.
651-266-1199
www.ramseycounty.us
Search: school recycling

Washington County

Technical assistance, labels, bins.
651-430-6655
www.co.washington.mn.us
Search: recycling