

Tennessee Pollution Prevention Partnership Success Story



Poplar Grove School
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Student Involvement is Key to Waste Reduction

The Member

Poplar Grove School is a community of creative and compassionate learners committed to continuous improvement. Poplar Grove was built on and named for the home site of Abram Maury, one of Franklin's founding fathers. We are a kindergarten through eighth grade balanced-calendar school that opened in July 2000. We have over 1,100 students and faculty. Poplar Grove School is committed to caring for the environment. Students are involved in activities that conserve, enhance and protect our school and community.

The Stories

In 2006-07 Poplar Grove School's waste reduction efforts had Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle elements. As in most school cafeterias, we have significant food waste from students. We decided to do a project to draw attention to this problem. The focus group was the 6th graders since they were preparing for an ecological three-day trip to the Great Smoky Mountain Institute at Tremont. Teachers provided classroom instruction in the week prior to our contest, emphasizing the food situation in many developing countries. Students were not told which days leftover food would be weighed and compared between the four classes. Students generated ideas, such as taking only what you will eat and sharing certain items with a friend. Reducing food waste was the goal.

Poplar Grove students and parents saw the need to make good use of unwanted books from home. Together they advertised a Used Book Sale through morning announcements, posters and our school newsletter. Students from the 6th grade class filled out an application to work the Sale. Several were interviewed and selected to handle purchases and organization for the two-day sale in February.

Poplar Grove has established an extensive recycling program including plastic bottles, aluminum cans, ink cartridges, cell phones and mixed paper. We have been striving for continuous improvement in all areas with a special focus on mixed paper recycling. A large school like PGS generates much paper waste. We needed to implement strategies to dramatically improve our paper recycling volumes. With a student-led effort, we did!

The Success

Brooks Ishler and Bailey Fuqua had the desire to wake up and encourage their generation to do their part in helping the environment. They founded the Poplar Grove **Green Team** with students in grades 5-8 in the fall of 2006. The **Green Team** meets on a regular basis and oversees our mixed paper

for recycling program. Funds generated from previous paper recycling through Williamson County Solid Waste Department were utilized to purchase bins for all classrooms, workrooms, and offices. Students used email and morning announcements to remind classes to put out bins for collection. A Power Point presentation during a school wide assembly provided education on acceptable mixed paper for recycling. All bins also have a posted list of acceptable paper. Students empty the bins into the large rolling containers and examine it for contaminants. The hall with the best recycling is recognized at the next assembly.

Student volunteers were selected from each class to monitor another classes' collection of cafeteria leftovers. A Poplar Grove parent supervised and weighed the food waste over the contest period, keeping the results a secret. Results were announced at the end of the week during the morning announcements. Congratulations went to Mrs. Baggett's class for the lowest food waste volume. Her students received Poplar bucks to be used at the 6th grade year-end auction.

Families donated books for reuse! Students came with their change to purchase \$.50 hardbacks and \$.25 soft cover books. The sale was held during regular school hours but also during an evening school event so parents could shop. Students and families were able to increase their home libraries for little cost. Money collected was utilized for elementary and middle school media center purchases.

The Pollution Prevented

Poplar Grove has seen significant improvement since the start of paper recycling. Records from Keep Williamson Beautiful showed 6,900 pounds collected in the 2002-2003 school year. Records from 2006 - 2007 showed 40,650 pounds collected! According to Keep Williamson Beautiful, 20.3 tons of recycled paper saved 345 trees (1 ton = 17 trees).

Poplar Grove students gained greater awareness of cafeteria food waste. The food waste decreased from several pounds per class prior to the contest to 13 ounces or less on contest days. Students were encouraged to carry over this awareness at home and continue to reduce waste at school.

Through a successful Used Book Sale, PGS collected over 3000 books and donated 560 unsold books to local nursing homes, Williamson County library, The Predators Foundation (needy in Metro Nashville), and Bridges, a domestic violence shelter. Way to show that PGS Pioneer Pride! **July 2007**