

## Awareness leads to schools' recycling effort

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

Increased environmental awareness, and pressure from its students, has made Farmington Public Schools the first district in Oakland County to embark on a full-fledged recycling program.

Not only does the district recycle polystyrene cafeteria trays — as do 13 of the 28 school districts in Oakland County — but it is the only district to recycle bond and computer paper as well. Elms also collect foam coffee cups for recycling. Employees are encouraged to use leftover colored bond paper for scratch pads.

The program was piloted at several schools in the fall and is scheduled to be in all buildings by this spring, school officials said.

"It really started with the enthusiastic support of our students," explained school board president Susan Remmel, describing the program during a recent State of the Cities address.

**PURCHASING SUPERVISOR** Bev Hausman, who coordinates the program with the district's garbage hauler, started getting calls from students last year encouraging the district to start a recycling program and bringing the issue to light. "The students were interested in getting projects started," she said. "They had formed committees. They were ready, even before we were."

The six pilot sites were North Farmington High, East Middle School, and Beechview, Highmeadow, Gill and Kenbrook elementary schools where students were responsible for rinsing and stacking their trays during the lunch hour. Others have come on board more recently, such as Wood Creek Elementary, which got on the recycling bandwagon about a month ago and reports a 50 percent reduction of cafeteria garbage just by recycling the foam trays.

"There's a big difference in what's going into the dumpsters," said food services supervisor Debra Larson. "That directly saves us money, because we pay by the number of times they pick up."

Larson said once the start-up effort was in place, work on the program was "minimal. It's like a machine." As of February, about half the school buildings were handling the cafeteria tray program.



SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

Student awareness throughout the Farmington Public Schools prompted the district to implement a recycling program this year. Here, O.E. Dunckel Middle School sixth graders Dwan

Sevy places her polystyrene food tray into the cafeteria recycling bin, followed by Michael Webberman (left), Aaron Zorn, Kelly Hugheson and Emily Wilson.

All school buildings started a bond paper recycling program in the fall.

BILL LEE, a facilities and plant department consultant for Oakland

Schools, said Farmington, Novi and Southfield are the most active school districts in recycling polystyrene trays, and that Farmington is the only one which has tackled paper

*'The students were interested in getting projects started. They had formed committees. They were ready even before we were.'*

— Bev Hausman  
school district  
purchasing supervisor

products. "As someone who grew up in the '60s, I think it's really nice kids are becoming involved again," he said.

Hausman said the program not only impacts district operations, but is a learning tool for students as well. "The children will take it into their home situation and hopefully, form habits for a lifetime," she added.

At the moment, the program is costing the district a small amount, Hausman said, but she expects that to even out as recycling becomes more commonplace in the business community. She said although the district pays to have the recyclables hauled away, it is saving money with less garbage pickups.

Also to consider in the future, will be the purchasing of items made from recycled materials. Those are still overpriced and Hausman said she will consider purchasing such products when prices become competitive.

"They still cost more," she said. "We're hoping the market will drive that price down."

Local business leaders may want to pay attention, and follow the school district's lead.

Mandatory curbside recycling will begin July 1 for residents in Farmington and Farmington Hills, and business and industry will be next in line as Oakland County gets closer to running out of landfill space in the next few years, said Robert Deadman, Farmington's city manager who also chairs a regional solid waste authority.

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