

School Recycling Challenge Offers Cash Prizes

By David Goldstein, VCPWA, IWMD

Next month, Keep California Beautiful, a non-profit organization, will coordinate a statewide recycling competition between schools. Cash prizes, funded by commercial sponsors, will be awarded to schools for placing first through fifth in each of 18 categories. That is 90 possible opportunities to win prizes ranging from \$1,000 (for first place) to \$100 (fifth place).

Local schools are preparing now to compete, and last week, local recycling coordinators vied to give schools in their jurisdiction a boost. Rod Cordova, an Analyst with the City of Thousand Oaks Public Works Department, highlighted the competition on the city's school recycling website. Lisa McCullough, an Environmental Resource Analyst with the Ventura County Public Works Agency, sent a letter promoting the competition to each of the 36 kindergarten through twelfth grade schools in the areas of Ventura County outside of cities. Brandon Kaysen, an Environmental Sustainability Specialist with the city of Ventura, sent an email through the Ventura Unified School District to 73 school recycling contacts and offered to compile data for Ventura schools each week during the month-long competition. His goal this year is to help 10 Ventura schools enter the competition, equaling the total reached by schools in unincorporated areas, outside city limits, last year.

Last year, 324 schools entered the competition statewide, and local schools won in multiple categories. For example, EP Foster elementary school in Ventura won a total of \$1,100 after finishing second place in lunch tray recycling (18,296 trays) and finishing third in four other categories. Those other categories were total recycling per capita, 43.25 pounds per student; paper recycled, 315.6 pounds; paper recycled per capita, 0.71 pounds per student; and lunch trays recycled per capita, 41.3 trays per student.

The Academy of Technology and Leadership at Saticoy (ATLAS, previously Saticoy Elementary School) also won last year. They received \$800 for placing second in total recycling per capita, 49.35 pounds; second in cardboard lunch trays recycled per capita, 47.22 trays; and third in total number of lunch trays recycled, 15,912 trays.

Small schools can compete against large ones, as many of the categories measure results on a per student basis. Last year, The Thacher School, a relatively small, private school in the Ojai Valley, recycled the second most cardboard on a per capita basis statewide (1.42 pounds) and the most mixed recyclables on a per capita basis (39.45 pounds). Uncharacteristically for a small school, Thacher also took second place last year in the category of total weight for mixed recyclables (14,400 pounds).

Schools may count material generated only during the month of competition and may not include material brought from students' homes. For the month of February, students, under supervision of school staff or volunteers, weigh or estimate volume, photograph, and track material recycled. Many schools do not enter in every category, simplifying data collection.

“The Recycling Challenge can either bolster existing programs and get more students involved or can be an incentive to kick off and jump start a new program,” said Kaysen, the city of Ventura Environmental Sustainability Specialist.

Schools may register for the competition at www.greencaschool.org