



PTA Council & PAUSD Guidelines for Sustainable School Events

Help reinforce the environmental messages we teach our children by making an effort to reduce, reuse, compost, and recycle during school events. Here are some tips to help, and they help save money, too.

First, use leftover party supplies (plates, cups, napkins, etc.) from previous years before buying more. You may also consider BYOP (Bring your own plate, cups, utensils, etc.) in asking your attendees to provide their own food-ware when possible. Then...

Napkins

- When you can, have students put their snacks on a napkin instead of a plate.
- Bonus: all napkins are compostable, so this is a great place for color, themes, etc.

Plates

- If you need plates, choose paper plates because they can go in the compost.
- The old-fashioned thin, plain, non-shiny white paper plates are a great, affordable option!

Utensils

- Plan for snacks that are finger foods and don't require forks or spoons.
- If you need utensils, select reusable or compostable options.
- Plastic utensils are not recyclable. Please keep them out of the recycle bins.

Cups

- Reusable cups are best, so choose them when possible.
- Paper cups are the second-best choice because they are compostable.
- Non-Styrofoam plastic cups can be recycled.
- To reduce waste, avoid individual single-use beverage containers (e.g., bottled water, juice boxes).

Tablecloths

- Avoid disposable plastic tablecloths. They are not recyclable or compostable.
- Reusable tablecloths are a good investment because they can be saved and used for lots of events.

Planning for a sustainable event:

Reuse (best choices)

plates, utensils, cups - consider reusable party supplies

Compost (good choices)

food, soiled paper (e.g., napkins, plates, cups), and compostable plastics (e.g., utensils and cups - MUST be labeled "compostable")

Recycle (good choices)

aluminum foil, plastic cups (not Styrofoam), paper packaging (e.g., cracker boxes), rigid plastic containers (e.g., plastic jugs)

Landfill (avoid!)

plastic utensils, disposable tablecloths, plastic or mixed material wrappers, Styrofoam, juice boxes

Set up Waste Stations:

Check with your facility regarding containers available for waste stations.

- Set up waste stations, color-coded compost, recycle, and garbage containers.
 - a. Containers should be placed directly beside each other.
 - b. Stations should be placed in convenient and visible locations.
- Include 'What Goes Where' signage, preferably at eye level, for every container.
- Consider having a person monitor each waste station during the event to help attendees sort properly.

Waste Station Example for schools in Palo Alto



If you're considering buying reusable party supplies for your event, please let Rebecca Navarro, PAUSD district Sustainability Program Manager know. She is happy to help with decision-making and share best practices around reusable supplies. Contact her at rnavarro@pausd.org.