“We wanted to let you know the huge impact that participating in the Waste-Free Lunch Contest has had on our students! This is the last day of school, and in reading our students’ digital memory books, the theme of greenness was clear - time and time again, a majority of kids wrote that one of the most memorable events of the school year was participating in this Contest. Thank you for the opportunity! We are so grateful to be a Green Star School!”

-Stephanie and Katy, teachers, Eagle Crest Elementary

Eco-Cycle’s Green Star Schools program is the first comprehensive Zero Waste schools project in the nation. The goal is to move each school as close as possible to Zero Waste. This is done by monitoring trash volumes, initiating compost collections, increasing the volume of recyclables collected, implementing multiple waste reduction projects, and conducting extensive training and education.

Eco-Cycle’s project is unique because: 1) it targets the collection of compostables (food waste and non-recyclable paper) from entire school waste streams, including lunchrooms, kitchens, classrooms, offices and restrooms (paper towels), 2) it emphasizes waste reduction in addition to composting and recycling, 3) all students and staff are integrated into the program and 4) participating schools are provided with extensive and on-going support, feedback, incentives, rewards and special projects.

Our ultimate goal is to have every school in Boulder Valley School District and St. Vrain Valley School District enrolled. Achieving this goal depends on adequate funding.

Two new Green Star Schools were launched this year from different areas of Boulder County. Nederland Elementary had a full relaunch after being on hiatus for over 10 years. New compost collection opportunities in Nederland made it possible for them to resume participation. In addition, Boulder High School became the newest high school to join the program. A total of 2,133 new students and 164 new staff were added as participants. Ancevine Middle School in Lafayette was also scheduled to launch in early April, with all preliminary work with the staff and student sponsor group in place. Their launch has been deferred until fall due to the COVID-19 school closure. The anticipated launch of Columbine Elementary in Longmont has also been deferred until next school year.

Currently 55 Boulder County schools are enrolled, which represents 64% of the public schools in the County. The total number of participants in the program is now 26,441 students and 3,417 staff. In addition, approximately 124 tons of compostables and 161 tons of recyclables were diverted from the landfill between August and mid-March (when schools were closed) of the 2019-2020 school year.

This school year also marked the addition of a third full-size high school to the program, and the continued development of the new Green Star Schools high school model. Boulder High became a Green Star School in January. With this launch, the City of Boulder became the first city in the United States to have all of its public schools practicing Zero Waste!
In the months prior to Boulder High’s kick-off, Eco-Cycle worked with a student sponsor group. Eco-Cycle also worked closely with an environmental science teacher and her class, starting in January. Students in this class filmed and produced a video to explain what it means to be a Green Star School and how to sort waste materials properly. The videos were shown in class to all students on Panther TV (Boulder High’s internal TV station). Panther TV students and their teacher continued to support the launch of the program with the filming and production of additional videos. In addition, a student-designed logo (above) was created by a member of the student sponsor group.

To further prepare the student body for the launch, Eco-Cycle designed a 20-minute presentation that was given to most science classes. In order to connect with more students, a partnership was formed with the AVID and ILC staff (programs that focus on underserved and special-needs students) to ensure that their classes also received the information. The presentation included local landfill and recycling data specific to their school and city, as well as video segments demonstrating the environmental benefits of composting and reusing materials. Students participating in the sponsor group requested that this presentation incorporate the message of “hope.” In response, this was made a consistent message in all Boulder High presentations.

Finally, durable plates, bowls and utensils were introduced by BVSD Food Services. The student-made videos and Eco-Cycle presentations each featured the importance of durables, along with instructions on how to return food-service items to the school’s kitchen.

Over the next two years, we will continue to add Green Star School high schools while further developing the new high school model. We will be exploring new ways to use contests, social media, classroom presentations and student incentives to increase participation and reduce contamination in high schools.

The Green Star Schools program began with four pilot schools in February of 2005: Douglass Elementary, Horizons K-8, Boulder Community School of Integrated Studies and High Peaks Elementary. The following schools have been added in subsequent years:

- Spring of 2006: Mesa Elementary, Bear Creek Elementary, Creekside Elementary, Foothill Elementary
- Spring of 2007: Eisenhower Elementary, Heatherwood Elementary, Columbine Elementary, Lyons Elementary, Niwot Elementary
- Spring of 2008: Louisville Elementary, Community Montessori, Summit Middle
- Spring of 2009: University Hill Elementary, Ryan Elementary, Eagle Crest Elementary, Longmont Estates Elementary
- Spring of 2010: Southern Hills Middle, Lafayette Elementary, Blue Mountain Elementary
- Spring of 2011: Manhattan Middle, Fireside Elementary, Crest View Elementary
- 2011-2012: Casey Middle, Red Hawk Elementary, Flatirons Elementary, Whittier Elementary
- 2012-2013: Burlington Elementary, Jamestown Elementary, New Vista High
- 2013-2014: Central Elementary, Coal Creek Elementary
- 2014-2015: Hygiene Elementary, Pioneer Elementary, Gold Hill Elementary, Mapleton Early Childhood Education Center
- 2015-2016: Indian Peaks Elementary, Louisville Middle, Centennial Middle
- 2016-2017: Lyons Middle/Senior, Platt Middle, Monarch PK-8
- 2017-2018: Sanchez Elementary, Arapahoe Campus, Sunset Middle, Altona Middle
- 2018-2019: Northridge Elementary, Mountain View Elementary, Fairview High, Centaurus High
Twenty-seven of the 55 Green Star Schools are located in Boulder, creating routing efficiencies for the compost collection system. As Eco-Cycle has expanded its compost collection routes into new communities, we have also been able to work with schools in other areas. Participating schools in Nederland, Jamestown, Gold Hill, Lyons, Niwot and Hygiene represent expansion into those communities. Longmont Estates, Eagle Crest, Blue Mountain, Burlington, Central, Indian Peaks, Northridge and Mountain View Elementary Schools, and Sunset and Altona Middle Schools, are participating schools in the City of Longmont. Ryan, Lafayette, Pioneer and Sanchez Elementary Schools, and Centaurus High are located in Lafayette. Louisville, Fireside and Coal Creek Elementary Schools, Monarch PK-8 and Louisville Middle, are located in Louisville. Red Hawk Elementary is located in Erie. Thirty-eight participating schools are elementary level, nine are middle level, two are PK-8 schools, one is a middle/senior and five are high schools.

We continue to integrate English-as-a-second-language and lower-income students into the program as we expand into new schools. Pioneer, Lafayette, Ryan, University Hill, Columbine, Creekside, Crest View, Whittier, Eisenhower, Sanchez, Burlington, Central, Indian Peaks, Northridge and Mountain View Elementary Schools, Angevine, Casey, Manhattan, Centennial and Sunset Middle Schools, and Centaurus High School all serve these populations. Overall, Green Star Schools have an average of 25% of students qualifying for free/reduced price lunch, 13% of students are English-language learners and 33% of students identify as non-Caucasian.

In the fall, we conducted Five-Year and Ten-Year Celebrations to acknowledge those schools that recently completed one of these program anniversaries. Celebrations include an award assembly at which a certificate of recognition is presented by the Superintendent of Schools and/or a Boulder County Commissioner. The Ten-Year Celebrations also include a presentation by Hawk Quest featuring live birds of prey. The goal is to help students understand the connection between Zero Waste and preserving the natural world. Following the assemblies, two to three days of reinforcement and retraining activities take place for students and staff including classroom presentations, lunchroom quizzes, cloth-napkin making and a spin-the-wheel quiz activity at recess. This year’s five-year schools were those launched in the 2013-2014 school year, and the ten-year schools were those launched in the spring of 2009 (see above).

Key Project Activities for the School Year:

1. Activities for the newest Green Star Schools:
   - Monitoring trash volumes before kick-off
   - Working with each student sponsor group to do a trash audit, create posters, give announcements, create videos and logos, and/or assist with cafeteria durables
   - Working with school staff in several meetings and site visits to prepare for kick-off
   - Labeling and distribution of all internal and external containers for each school
   - Kick-off assemblies (elementary) or classroom presentations (secondary) for all grade levels
   - Letters sent home to families
   - Individual classroom follow-up trainings for all elementary classes
   - Lunchroom monitoring for six weeks after each kick-off
   - Post kick-off monitoring of trash and compost volumes to determine the appropriate reduction of trash service
   - End-of-the-year feedback and motivators, including a party for the sponsor group and graphs of program progress for the hallway and newsletter
2. Activities for schools launched in the previous two school years:
   - Tabling at back-to-school events to promote the program and waste-free lunch concepts
   - Fall grade-level assemblies or classroom presentations to reinvigorate staff and students, retrain on the sorting system and emphasize waste-free lunch concepts
   - Cafeteria monitoring to maintain student participation and reduce contamination
   - Ongoing work with student sponsor groups, including trash audits and student-created promotional tools such as posters, announcements, skits, blogs or videos
   - Spring party for student sponsor groups

3. Schools that have been in the program for more than three years are eligible for any of the above services on request. Most schools take a year or two off, then request a customized set of services to keep their program vital.

4. Our preschool presentation, “Ready, Set, Recycle!”, which focuses on recycling and composting, is delivered to all Green Star School preschool classes.

5. “Critters Creating Compost: The Secret Life of Soil” presentations are given to kindergarten, first and second grade classes in each new Green Star School, and to all kindergartens in all other Green Star Schools.

6. Two to three cubic yards of compostables are collected weekly from each school and diverted from the landfill.

7. Green Star Schools also have the opportunity to integrate Zero Waste practices into all-school community events. Eco-Cycle works with the planning committee to ensure that food service items are recyclable, compostable or reusable. We monitor waste stations at events and set up information tables to educate families. Between August and mid-March of the 2019-2020 school year, we participated in 12 events, including all-school picnics, carnivals and sporting events. Eco-Cycle was scheduled to support several additional Zero Waste events in the spring semester, however these were cancelled when students moved to remote instruction due to COVID-19.

Special Green Star Schools Projects:
1. The 2020 Waste-Free Lunch Contest was held in the spring. Seven schools competed to see which could reduce their lunch trash the most over a one-week period. (Six more schools were registered, but were not able to participate due to COVID-19.) Eco-Cycle staff weighs each school’s trash twice before and twice during its contest week to determine the amount of trash reduced. Schools must also show that they are successfully washing and reusing their cafeteria durables. Schools receive points for the least number of durables thrown away. One week before kick-off, a student sponsor group is oriented to the project, given posters to color and hang in the hallways, and PA system announcements to practice and deliver. Eco-Cycle conducts kick-off assemblies, when requested, that include all grade levels at each school. A parent letter is sent home to involve parents in the project. First prize in the contest is $400 and second prize is $200.
2. This was the tenth year of the Reusables Rule at Our School! Reusable Water Bottle Project. The project was funded by the City of Boulder, BVSD and Eco-Cycle. The goal is to eliminate waste from single-use water bottles and to promote the safety of tap water, while also making it easier for kids to refill their bottles at school. The project involves automatic-bottle-filler retrofits to school water fountains and an education campaign. Parent letters, announcements, posters and student contests (with water bottle and movie ticket prizes) are customized for each school. This year, three Green Star Schools have benefited by either receiving a new filler, an educational campaign or both. Participating schools were Mesa Elementary, University Hill Elementary and Casey Middle. Mesa Elementary completed all aspects of the project in January. University Hill Elementary and Casey middle were scheduled to have their education campaigns in the spring, but due to COVID-19, their education campaigns have been deferred until fall.

4. The Green Star Schools coloring book is distributed to kindergarten, first and second grade students in our newest elementary schools. The coloring book contains activities that reinforce recycling and composting skills. After completing the six coloring/activity pages, the book unfolds into a large poster that students can color and display at home.

5. We continued to promote the Green Star Schools Children’s Used Book Project. As a benefit for participation in the program, Green Star Schools have access to thousands of used children’s books collected at the Eco-Cycle/City of Boulder Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials. The books are used for fundraisers, student rewards and student incentives (instead of toys, candy, wrapping paper, etc.), reducing the generation of garbage and promoting literacy. This school year, we piloted a project to offer an onsite book table during the Five and Ten-year Celebrations. University Hill, Coal Creek and Eagle Crest Elementary Schools were part of the pilot. Approximately 1,500 books were selected and taken home by elementary-aged children. Eco-Cycle also coordinated with a neighbor of Coal Creek Elementary to provide books for her free-library, located across the street from the school. Green Star Schools received 8,190 books this year.

6. Another Green Star Schools waste-reduction project is the end-of-the-year Classroom Cleanout. It was not possible to complete this project in-school this year due to COVID-19. Instead, we supported students and teachers in their waste-reduction efforts by providing a virtual presentation on how to sort waste from classrooms and lockers properly, with an emphasis on reusing supplies when possible.

7. The Green Star Schools Zero Waste Events and Party Tips flier has been revised and is given to teachers and parent helpers each year, providing suggestions for creating less waste during classroom parties.

8. Eco-Cycle’s Holiday Zero Waste Guide is distributed each December to families in the Green Star Schools. The guide is offered in English and Spanish.

9. The twice-a-year newsletter, Green Star Schools News, is distributed to share ideas between participating schools.

10. Eco-Cycle’s website (www.ecocycle.org/schools/gss) links to participating schools’ websites to help them publicize their Zero Waste efforts.

11. Durable Green Star Schools banners and posters are offered to each school for display.

12. Boulder Valley School District Education Center staff maintain a Zero Waste program in their building that is part of the Green Star Schools program.
Program Successes and Challenges:

As a result of the activities described above, all 55 Green Star Schools continue to make progress in working toward Zero Waste. Between August 2019 and the COVID-19 closure in mid-March 2020, we conducted 555 Green Star presentations and events involving 15,173 students and staff. As the number of enrolled schools increases, on-going education and reinforcement for all schools puts increasing demands on Eco-Cycle staff. For this reason, the annual program budget continues to increase, as does the need for funding. In addition, schools continue to add their names to the waitlist. Currently, there are 26 listed. To address the need for expanded funding, Eco-Cycle works with Boulder County, the City of Boulder, the City of Longmont, Boulder Valley School District and St. Vrain Valley School District to create a funding partnership. This partnership, in combination with Eco-Cycle funding and multiple grants, allows the program to continue.

In November, Eco-Cycle was honored to be selected by the First Gentleman of Colorado, Marlon Reis, for a school visit to learn more about the Green Star Schools program. It is his intention to start a recognition program that allows the Governor to acknowledge and support the top sustainability programs in Colorado schools. The Green Star Schools program was chosen as the most comprehensive and innovative Zero Waste program in the state. The First Gentleman visited Eagle Crest Elementary in Longmont and was given an impressive and inspiring tour and presentation by the Eco-Eagles, a student environmental group. Longmont’s Mayor, Boulder’s Mayor, State Representative Froelich, School Board members and members of the press were also in attendance.

An additional success story for the program is the continued advancement of the new high school model. Working with a large student body of 1,200-2,000 youth, and a school staff of up to 250, poses many new challenges and opportunities. Some of these are described below.

1. Educating incoming freshman:
Currently, BVSD high schools have a fall freshman-seminar class. Eco-Cycle collaborated with freshman-seminar teachers at the high schools launched last year to educate the new incoming freshman about the Green Star Schools program. Eco-Cycle developed a google slideshow for teachers and upperclassmen to deliver during the seminar. In order to make it more engaging and interactive, Eco-Cycle provided kits of materials for students to participate in a sorting relay. While feedback was positive, the sort materials were not returned. This loss represented a significant time investment. During collaborations with the second group of high-school freshman-seminar classes, we transitioned to an interactive Kahoot Quiz as the presentation’s activity. For fall 2020, Eco-Cycle hopes to film and produce an online video that can be shown during these seminar classes. This format will allow Eco-Cycle to ensure all freshman receive consistent messaging and education on the program.

2. Working with a student sponsor group:
In order to be inclusive of the large and diverse student population at the high school level, care is taken to invite students from different interest groups and clubs, as well as varying grade levels, to be part of the student sponsor group. During the second year of launching high schools into the program, meeting with student sponsor groups and producing deliverables continued to be a challenge. Working with high school student groups requires an extended lead time prior to kick-off, in comparison to elementary and middle schools. In January 2020, a teacher sponsor volunteered her environmental science class to support the launch of the program at Boulder High. A class with a scheduled meeting time and accountability to their teacher was a significant benefit to the success of that launch.
3. Accessing and educating all students on campus:
Traditionally, launching a Green Star School has included a kick-off assembly. Feedback from high-school focus groups (held with students and staff before each school’s launch) confirmed that assemblies would not be possible or effective. The challenge was then to determine how to publicize the launch and reach all of the students and staff. For Boulder High, Eco-Cycle prepared presentations to be given in science classes. Students in the environmental science class also prepared a video to be shown to all students on Panther TV, which reaches the entire student body. While these methods were effective and well received, we found that the messaging still failed to reach every student. Partnerships were then formed with teachers of AVID and ILC (programs that focus on underserved and special-needs students) in order to expand the program’s reach. For the same reason, another partnership was formed with the engineering department at Centaurus High. Eco-Cycle will continue to address the challenge of finding the appropriate modes to access all students, which will vary with each high school. Working with catering, business and engineering classes would be one approach.

At high schools in their second year, Eco-Cycle coordinated a school-wide waste-reduction campaign with existing clubs during the fall semester. These events were successful in raising awareness at each school. For example, Fairview students coordinated a clothing drive and donated 100 pounds of clothing to Attention Homes for reuse. Eco-Cycle would like to expand these efforts to create mini-campaigns during the 2020-21 school year. Partnerships are being explored to promote a waste-reduction challenge at each high school in the fall and/or spring semester. In addition, Eco-Cycle would like to provide opportunities to reach the entire school community through Zero Waste events, contests, student-project involvement and social media.

4. Accessing and educating all staff:
Accessing all high school staff is a challenge. Full-size high schools have far more teachers, administrators and custodial staff than elementary and middle schools. Finding the opportunity to train and motivate staff to participate is important. Presenting at a staff meeting is not always an option, but it remains the best way to reach the most faculty members. Special meetings and trainings with custodial staff, along with relationship building with office staff, is also essential. This year the outreach to staff was expanded by sharing an Eco-Cycle-prepared Google slideshow with all staff at Boulder High. Those that were not present at the staff meeting were able to access the information by watching the slideshow. This method of information sharing was well received.

5. Custodial labor considerations and collecting compostables:
High School buildings are large, multi-level buildings, containing many classrooms and different waste streams. Custodial staff cannot service all locations daily. Staff and students change rooms throughout the day as well, and cannot be held accountable for servicing classroom compost containers. It is impractical and unreasonable for custodial labor loads to place compost collection stations throughout a high school campus. Instead, discussions are held with the administration, teachers and custodial staff to determine the strategic placement of compost containers in locations that will provide the most benefit at each school. To date, these locations have been concentrated in the cafeteria, library, and the science, catering and art classrooms. When high schools use paper towel dispensers in bathrooms, these can be an easy location to divert paper towel waste for composting as well. Teachers at each school have requested compost collection containers for their individual spaces. When the request is outside of the designated locations, teachers must agree to empty their own container. This arrangement increases staff participation, while at the same time reducing custodial labor demands.

6. Open campus:
All three Green Star School high schools have open-campus policies. Students are allowed to come and go from campus throughout the day, including during lunch. The variety of waste from local restaurants that returns to campus is immense compared to elementary and middle schools. Each high school campus
experiences different waste streams as a result of the food establishments nearby. Care is taken at each school to address common waste items specific to their location, as well as educating students on the importance of using reusable food service items when possible.

7. Collection of durables:
BVSD Food Services continues to support waste reduction with the introduction, use and maintenance of durable plates, bowls, cups and utensils for lunch service. When a high school becomes a Green Star School, the use of durables begins. Durables are lost at a higher rate in high schools than in the lower grades as a result of student mobility and open campus policies.

8. Green Star Schools pyramids and open enrollment:
The Green Star Schools program is designed to mimic local school-enrollment pyramids. First, the elementary school level of a feeder system is launched, then the middle school level and finally the high school level. The goal is for the majority of students reaching high school to have attended a Green Star elementary and middle school. The option to open enroll in Colorado introduces irregularities into the pyramid scheme. Students may open enroll outside of their home-school feeder, leading to possible gaps in their Zero Waste experience as they progress through the grade levels. Since all schools are not yet Green Star Schools, this leads to lower participation and higher contamination in middle and high schools. As more Boulder County schools are funded to become enrolled in the program, this gap will decrease.

Services Provided to Green Star Schools During the Time of On-line Learning Due to COVID-19:

During March, April and May of 2020, while schools were closed due to COVID-19, we were challenged to create new ways to keep participating schools engaged in the program. To address this, the following outreach was provided to all Green Star Schools:

- Special 50-year anniversary Earth Day publication and video for families with reduce, reuse, recycle and compost information and activities to do at home (April)
- Special announcement to schools about the Recycle Colorado annual poster contest (April)
- Spring 2020 Green Star Schools Newsletter for school staff (May)
- Locker and classroom cleanout video for staff, students and families highlighting reuse and recycling of school supplies (May)
- Special end-of-the-school-year publication and video highlighting Zero Waste and sustainability activities to do at home for the summer (May)

In addition, we developed on-line curriculum for all grade levels that teachers can use in their classrooms, including virtual lessons and field trips on recycling, composting and Zero Waste. All offerings include newly-developed follow-up homework activities that emphasize reading/writing/communication and math.

The email below was sent to principals and teachers, potentially increasing the number of students and families exposed to these lessons and field trips over the norm for a typical school year. The link to view the on-line offerings is below.

Dear Teachers and Principals,

Many of you have asked us to create virtual versions of our presentations and field trips for this period of online learning. We have just completed virtual versions of several presentations for each grade level, as well as our Growing Green tour (with stops at the Boulder County Agricultural Heritage Center and Kilt Organic Farm) and our Wise With Waste tour (with stops at the Boulder County Recycling Center, the Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials and ReSource).
Each video lesson is filmed by one of our professional educators, is 30 minutes or less, and has an accompanying description. Each also has newly-developed supplemental activities that meet Colorado science, math and reading/writing/communication academic standards. Below is a spreadsheet with tabs for each grade level, and links to all that we have to offer. These resources are available to any teacher, free of charge.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1XGDWiWQDQXQeTJLv_9OZr75q_2V0z45FddvqSVnn0MU/edit?usp=sharing

Financials:
Funding was provided by the foundations and public agencies listed below. Eco-Cycle is grateful to these organizations for their generosity. The monies were used to fund staff time, materials, collection containers, education programs and incentive activities.

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<tr>
<th>Eco-Cycle Green Star Schools Program Budget 2019-2020</th>
<th>Projected</th>
<th>Actual</th>
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<td><strong>Expenses (through end of school year):</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Posters and fliers</td>
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Revenue:
Boulder Valley School District (compost collection) | $24,035 |
St. Vrain Valley School District (compost collection)| $9,100  |
Boulder County (program operating support)          | $30,000 |
City of Boulder (program operating support)          | $15,000 |
City of Longmont (program operating support)         | $5,000  |
Boulder Valley School District (program operating support) | $30,000 |
St. Vrain Valley School District (program operating support) | $10,000 |
GOCO funding                                       | $13,990 |
Ball Foundation                                     | $18,000 |
Oracle Grants Program                               | $15,000 |
Community Trust Fund/ Community Foundation serving Boulder County | $4,250 |
Western Digital                                     | $3,000  |
Northrop Grumman Corporation                        | $400    |
BVSD Trip Tracker                                   | $501    |
Eco-Cycle Deficit                                   | $44,585 |
**Total**                                          | $222,861 |
Funders:
Thanks to our Green Star Schools funders for their support during the 2019-20 school year!

BVSD Trip Tracker Student Donations
Northrop Grumman