

NBA MVP Talks Trash - Steve Nash Congratulates 2015 Grades of Green Trash Free Winner



Schools have recognized a need for environmental education and action, and statistics show that greening schools saves money, decreases absences, and increases test scores yet few have the resources necessary to produce tangible results. According to AB341 established in 2011, California has set a goal to achieve a 75% waste diversion rate by the year 2020. Furthermore, In October of 2014 Governor Brown signed AB 1826 which requires schools and businesses to compost organic waste as of April 1, 2016. There is an undeniable demand for a fun, hands-on program that teaches kids the importance of protecting the environment and inspires them to want to take action.

Grades of Green partnered with the Sanitation Districts in 2011 to develop the Trash Free Lunch Challenge (TFLC) to fill this need. Since its inception, our partnership has supported 73 schools in implementing waste reduction programs, resulting in over 45,000 students educated and over 1,354 tons of trash diverted from entering landfills each year. The Trash Free Lunch Challenge is currently recruiting schools for the fifth annual Challenge. Interested schools can email info@gradesofgreen.org or call (310) 607-0175 to register today!

“The goal of the Trash Free Lunch Challenge is not only to reduce waste but also to teach children how to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost. Educating children empowers families to continue improving the communities we serve.” said Grace Hyde, Sanitation Districts’ Chief Engineer and General Manager.

This initiative has been so well received by the community, that it gained national attention. For example, Steve Nash, retired Los Angeles Laker and former National Basketball Association's Most Valuable Player, congratulated the 2015 winning elementary school (Inglewood's Oak Street Elementary School) in person at the community-wide ceremony where Oak Street was awarded an education grant to continue greening their school.

Ninety percent of the students, who attend this winning school, rely on free and reduced cost lunch programs to make ends meet. In addition, the campus is adjacent to the Los Angeles International Airport, and thereby subject to associated environmental (air quality, noise, and traffic) impacts. Oak Street Elementary School overcame these economic and environmental challenges to develop a comprehensive student led waste reduction program that successfully diverts 30 tons of trash per school year. This community of educators, custodians, parents, and student leaders developed a program that includes innovative components such as food share bins, which not only reuse resources but also fill a community need, by providing meals and snacks to families in need.

¹ Pictured left to right (1) Grades of Green 2015 Trash Free Lunch Challenge Winning School Oak Street Elementary Green Team and Environmental Judges (2) MBA MVP Steve Nash Presents Education Grant to Oak Street Elementary School (3) Oak Street Green Team Explains Composting to Environmental Judges.

Oak Street uses incentives to encourage student to bring reusable items and pack a trash free lunch. Throughout the program, teachers sent home bilingual letters in English and Spanish. The first detailed the benefits of bringing a trash free lunch or reusable water bottle from home and provided instructions on how to do this. The second detailed the contest and defined their role in supporting the TFLC.

Waste reduction has been woven into not only campus but also community culture. Grades of Green introduced Oak Street to the Earthwatch Institute, and through this partnership a faculty member (Ms. Claire Darsa) will be researching climate change in the Arctic during the summer (2015). For more on this read "Oak School Goes Green, Teacher to Conduct Summer Research at Arctic Circle" at www.iusd.net.

Oak Street worked with many different departments on campus as well as organizations outside the school to make this program a long-term, sustainable success and something the entire state of California can be proud of. Organizations such as the Oak Street Spirit of Service volunteer group, the LEAP after school student leadership program, the parent teacher association, and even their waste hauler (Republic Services) contributed to make this successful program the result of a truly integrated regional approach to waste reduction.

Are you sorry you missed it? Not to worry, community outreach opportunities abound here in Los Angeles County. Grades of Green and the Sanitation Districts are set to kick off the 2016 TFLC with a training day for interested educators set for Thursday, October 1, 2015 at JAO. This kickoff training day will provide best practices for a successful program as well as a tour of our Puente Hills Materials Recovery Facility to give participants a chance to see our recycling operations in action. For more information please go to <http://www.gradesofgreen.org/>

