

THE ABINGTON JOURNAL

Lackawanna Trail Elementary Center students begin recycling program

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Published: April 4, 2016



FACTORYVILLE — When Lackawanna Trail fifth-grader Kayla Wood noticed people throwing recyclable bottles into the trash, she thought something should be done to address the issue.

“It’s not good for the Earth and we read a story in our Language Arts class about kids recycling and starting a garden in the recess yard at their school,” Wood said.

The long amount of time it takes for materials to decompose stood out in fellow fifth-grader Emma Fowler’s mind from the lesson.

Wood and Fowler approached Lackawanna Trail Elementary Center Principal Brian Kelly in December about the possibility of starting a recycling program at the school.

“They came with a clear message, which is awesome as an administrator,” Kelly said. “They came with a problem and they had a solution, which is very nice. These girls have changed the school forever.

“We started small, but it’s really picking up steam. We have two sets of bins in the building (one for cans and bottles and one for paper materials). I’ve had numerous staff members come to me and say, ‘thank you for doing this, we’ve been waiting for this for a long time.’ I mention the girls names to let them know it was their idea, not mine.”

According to Kelly, the school had previously recycled at a “very basic level” prior to the girls’ initiative.

“The paper from the copy room was recycled weekly, but it was sporadic in the individual classrooms,” Kelly said. “Most of our staff would also bring their bottles home (to recycle).”

The girls are dedicated to making the program even better by sacrificing some of their free time.

“We’re trying to find a way to spend our recess time rinsing out the bottles and cans,” Wood said.

Fowler and her family noticed the benefits of recycling after relocating to the area from Colorado.

“The first couple years we didn’t recycle at all,” she said. “After we started, we could see how much of a difference it makes. We have seven people in my family and the garbage took up so much space.”

Fowler and Wood researched recycling bins on several websites and after talking with representatives from the Wyoming County Recycling Center were notified of Busch Systems, based in Canada, which provided the bins to the school at no cost.

According to Kelly, Busch Systems has previously worked with many college campuses, but Lackawanna Trail is one of the first elementary schools that has utilized their services.

Kelly added two staff members have volunteered to take the bins to the recycling center each week and the maintenance staff has also assisted in the recycling process.

Currently, the program has been primarily limited to staff members as a precautionary measure.

“The faculty members are using the bins heavily right now,” Kelly said. “While the teachers are on lunch duty, if they see anyone with plastics or recyclable materials they place them in the bins.

“In a primary school with little kids, you can get all kinds of weird stuff in there.”

Fowler believes there is further room for the program to expand at the elementary center.

“I think it would be cool in the future if all of the students could throw their excess food in one container and all of the recyclables in another,” she said.

Kelly believes the school’s R.O.A.R. (Respectful, Organized, Accepting, Responsible) initiative to address behavioral issues has helped students develop a better comfort level with teachers and administrators, and may have led to the girls approaching him with their recycling idea.

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