



2006 - 2007 Award Winners

The School Recycler of the Year *Highland Park Elementary School's Recycling Program*

Highland Park Elementary is a multi-cultural K-5 school located in downtown Columbia, Tennessee, and is part of Maury County Public school System.

Principal Wanda Dunn initially started the recycling program about 10 years ago. She recognized the availability and worth of the untapped aluminum can resource, both at school and at students' homes. The last Wednesday of every month is aluminum can recycling day when students can bring in bags of cans from home. Some churches are also saving cans for Highland Park. There is a dedicated storage room at the back of the school, and cans are transported shortly after the collection.

The funds recouped from recycling aluminum cans have been dedicated to purchasing Accelerated Reader books, CD-ROMs, and DVDs for the library. With a student body of approximately 375 children, the recycling program generates an average of \$1,000/year.

For the first several years, Principal Dunn herself transported the cans to the recycler. In 2004, the PTO took responsibility and found a parent volunteer with a pick-up truck to provide the transportation. This duty is given to a different parent volunteer each year.

The program is promoted in several ways:

- School newspaper has a reminder notice to parents
- An announcement is made on the PA toe day before the collection
- The marquis sign in front of the school advertises the recycling day
- A monthly competition takes place between homerooms with a pizza or popcorn party sponsored by the PTO for the room that brings in the most cans
- Homeroom teachers collect the cans that students bring and put them in 30-gallon trash bags, which is the unit of measure for the competition.

Highland Park teacher Mary Hamilton signed up for TDEC's Green Schools Program in 2004 and expressed interest in expanding the recycling program to include paper and cardboard. Maury County Solid Waste Department received a Recycling Equipment grant in 2004 to put dumpsters and indoor collection containers in four pilot schools. Ms. Hamilton formed a Recycling Team of 5th graders that are responsible for collection the school paper. These students watch the film "On the Road to Recycling" which highlights several industries in Tennessee that make products from recycled materials. They also wear special tee shirts that they designed.

In fall 2006, new containers for plastic drink bottles were added to the recycling program. The Solid Waste Department has now purchased another small dumpster for recycling steel cans from the school cafeteria, which will soon be in use and will complete the collection of all possible recyclables from Highland Park. The Solid Waste Department picks up the school's mixed paper, cardboard, plastic and steel cans. There is no monetary reward for the school for recycling these commodities, but the school benefits by having less waste going to the landfill and a reduction in solid waste disposal fees. In addition, recycling has become part of the children's daily routine, establishing good environmental stewardship at a young age. Some families have started recycling at home as a result of the programs at Highland Park Elementary.

The school also recycles printer ink jet cartridges and cell phones, which they send to ERS-Imaging Company as a fundraiser. This program is augmented through participation from school families and has educated the students about the hazards of cell phone disposal in the landfill.

The Recycling Team at Highland Park is rewarded with an annual end-of-year field trip. Last spring, they visited the aluminum smelting plant in Mt. Pleasant where they saw the conversion of their recycled cans into ingots of aluminum that are transported to another company to make new cans. They also visited The Book Publishing Company in Summertown where all books are made with 100% recycled paper. They learned about organic gardening and composting after enjoying a vegetarian meal with ice cream made from soymilk. They also saw a car that runs exclusively on used cooking oil. Students in the younger grades really look forward to being a 5th grader so they can be on the Recycling Team.

This fall, Highland Park Elementary was one of the top ten recyclers in Eastman's Good Sports Always Recycle contest.

