

An Eco-Nomical Solution

By: Robert Ziegler

At Medea Creek Middle School, students, teachers and administrators are all focusing on making MCMS a more environmentally friendly school. Medea Creek was given the National Green Ribbon Award, a prestigious award only given to some of the best environmentally friendly school districts. Recently, a new program was implemented to help save the school money while being environmentally friendly at the same time. The program? A system of recycle bins, one for recycling, one for trash, and one for compostable food waste. Although this is a step in the right direction, it's not quite enough.

The main problem with the recycle bins is that students aren't using it. According to a student who uses recycle bins named Ron Thalanki, when asked if the school was doing enough to raise awareness for the program, stated that "No, they are not." The reason Thalanki believes this is because the only thing that the school did to tell students of the new recycling program was making a video announcement for about a week, then stopping entirely. Thalanki believes that, if the announcements were made to all students and everyone was able to hear it, "More students would use the recycling bins, and it would help save the planet".

The 8th grade teacher who implemented the program, Katie Cohen, agrees. "For the first couple days, about 5 out of 10 pieces of trash were placed in the correct bins. Then, at the end of the first two weeks, after awareness was raised, about 9 out of 10 pieces were in the correct bins. Now? At best, 5 pieces, but probably worse." At Medea Creek, students are often too lazy to spend their time sorting their trash. That means that things that must be implemented need to happen in a way that would involve the students

actually wanting to recycle, and feeling that they get something out of it, not simply asking them to recycle and expect them to do it.

It's a fact that schools make up more than a quarter of all paper waste in the United States, and that equates to about 18 million tons of paper (epa.gov). Though it is impossible to reduce all of this waste, there are several ways to reduce waste.

The first one would be educating the students. As Thalanki and Cohen agree, students don't know enough about recycling, how to do it, and the impact it makes. For example, if students knew that every ton of recycled paper saves approximately 4 barrels of oil, 4,200 kilowatt hours of energy and enough energy to heat and air-condition the average North American home for almost 6 months (alarecycling.com), they might be more willing to help save some of those 18 million tons of paper.

Second, it is critical to implement a clear recycling program. Right now, the bins aren't even labeled; causing students to question what goes where. As it only takes a couple wrong items in a bin to ruin the bin, as Cohen said, and having the bins not clearly labeled causes more wrong items to enter the bins. With a better recycling program, we would be able to recycle fewer wrong items, and generate more revenue from the recycling bins. We generate revenue from recycling bins because companies would pay the school for the compostable food waste and recycling, but what company would pay for compostable food waste mixed in with un-compostable garbage?

Next, creating a committee of students, teachers, and administrators to focus on our schools environmental impact would be important. Though, according to Deborah Ong, the Student Body President, one does not exist, it is something that she feels would be good to implement. "I think that it would be a good thing to have," she stated. "This

would allow everyone to feel more involved in focusing on having a low environmental impact.”

Finally, though this comes at a cost, having solar panels in our school would significantly cut energy bills and reduce our energy consumption. Though expensive, it has already been implemented at Oak Park High School with great success. Solar panels would pay for themselves, and would arguably be a good long-term investment. As Cohen said, when asked what she would improve on the school if money were no object “Solar panels would be really great for the school, and help us significantly become more environmentally friendly”.

To conclude, though Medea Creek is making great steps towards becoming more environmentally friendly, it could make several improvements. Making students more environmentally aware of their actions, improving our current recycling program, and implementing a solar panel system would help us become even more environmentally friendly than we already are.

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