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EcoSchool pilots green bin program

Martha Tanner
Kingston This Week

If the City of Kingston ever extends its green bin program to all schools, Lancaster Drive Public School can proudly point to its own collection and say, "Bin there, done that!"

Come January, the school in the city's west end will roll out a pilot project to determine the feasibility of offering green bin programming in schools.

The pilot project came about as a direct result of lobbying by students and staff at the school, which recently earned gold certification, the highest level possible, from the Ontario Eco-Schools program.

The journey from cafeteria to curbside began last October, when the school participated in the week-long Waste-Free Lunch Challenge. Members of the Environment Club, then led by teacher Jennifer Anderson, conducted a 'garbage audit', determinedly weighing all lunch waste each day and recording the results on a bar graph posted in the foyer. The audit revealed that most waste thrown out - including pizza crusts, paper towels and food scraps - is compostable and recyclable. And even though the school already encourages everyone to bring waste-free lunches and snacks, the Environment Club collected over 11 pounds of compostable,

green bin material.

That's when the 40-member strong club decided to write letters to the Limestone District School Board and the City of Kingston asking that the municipal green bin program be offered to schools. "When the teachers heard about it, they all wanted to do it," said principal Peggy Browne.

So, during Earth Week in April, students and staff signed their names on a green bin and stuffed it with some 300 letters in support of a green bin program at their school. They presented the bin and letters to Mayor Mark Gerretsen, who submitted them to municipal council at its September 20 council. On November 15, a motion by the Mayor that city staff begin a pilot project "to determine the merits of extending Green Bin use to full time status" was carried. The pilot project will run from January 2 to June 29, 2012. Staff will present a follow-up feasibility report in July, including the cost to run the program "to be paid by any school wishing to participate in future Green Bin programming".

The city has had requests before to offer green bin programming beyond residential properties, said Derek Ochej, Public Education & Promotion Coordinator, but Lancaster's green bin stuffed with letters "was definitely the most impactful, that's for sure".

Ochej added that the success of the pilot project will be determined by the amount of waste diverted from the landfill and the rate of contamination by waste that is not supposed to be in the green bins. The program will also have an impact on the operations

of the Public Works Department, since the municipality does not typically pick up garbage, recycling or compost from schools or other institutions. If the program is deemed successful, it may be expanded to other schools.

At a school assembly to announce the pilot project on December 20, Ochej told the students, "This is a really great thing. This is going to reduce the amount of garbage that goes to the landfill from the school. You are setting a big example for other schools in Kingston as well."

"It's a lot of responsibility, but I know you're up to the challenge," Ochej continued. "Since the green bin program started, over 10,000 tonnes of organic waste have been diverted from the landfill - that's 300 school buses full of food scraps!"

School caretaker Dan Scott, who has been instrumental in helping the Environment Club achieve its goals and who was recognized last month for his work with the Barry C. O'Connor Excellence in Support Staff Award, said that school has doubled its recycling since the Environment Club was formed. "I'm really excited about the green bin program," he said. Although it entails a bit of extra work, ensuring that right materials go into the green bins, it will be worth it if it makes the children more environmentally aware and instills in them good habits for a lifetime.

"The great thing is for children to know they can make a difference," said principal Browne. "That's really key. That's why we're excited. We have been working on the theme of 'you can make a difference' for a long time, and now we are seeing it happen."

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Martha Tanner Kingston This Week

Lancaster Drive Public School will become the first school in Kingston to have a green bin program, starting in January. Celebrating the announcement - and 'Green Bin Day' at the school Dec. 20 - are members of the Environment Club with, (l-r) principal Peggy Browne, Joe Hendry, Energy & Environment Technologist with the Limestone District School Board, Derek Ochej, Public Education & Promotion Coordinator with the City of Kingston, school caretaker Dan Scott, David Fowler, Manager of the Facility Services with the board, and teacher Catherine Dudley.