

CAFETERIA PLASTIC SURVEY “how to” - a first step towards Plastic Free Lunch Day

What is a Cafeteria Plastic Survey?

The Cafeteria Plastic Survey (CPS) is an alternative to conducting a full waste audit. The primary goals are to visualize, quantify, and ultimately reduce the amount of single-use plastic items used in the school cafeteria. You and your team will sort, count and photograph. No weighing necessary!

You have the option to lead just one CPS, but if you can conduct two surveys as part of a campaign, your efforts will be magnified, setting the stage for a school-wide plastic free culture. The surveys are as follows:

- **Before** your campaign for acquiring baseline data, and
- **After** your campaign for a visual comparison that shows progress.

Data-messaging conveys the urgent need for reducing plastic use in your school and community.

Providing your school community with the opportunity to actually see the data in a visual, easy-to-understand message can be *the* motivational factor for the school community (including administration) to jump on board.

This **data visualization strategy** can be applied to other plastic free school actions too. Beyond the lunch period, this methodology can be used for any **Plastic Free Lunch Day** initiative and plastic free campaign.



The plastic pollution crisis is fueling the climate crisis.
- 99% of plastic comes from fossil fuels.

Together, we can catalyze the next cultural and economic shift away from single-use plastics, starting right in our own school cafeterias! Are you in?



Can leading a Cafeteria Plastic Survey in 1 school actually make a difference?

Absolutely! Leading small pilots with powerful visual data, one school at a time, was how Cafeteria Culture catalyzed the grassroots victory to eliminate plastic Styrofoam trays from all NYC DOE Schools. This led more dominoes to fall as NYC School Food had to partner with the 9 other largest urban school districts to collectively purchase compostable plates and utensils, thereby shifting manufacturing trends on a national scale. One small grassroots effort can have national impact. Now let's eliminate all single-use plastic from our school cafeterias!

STEPS

A. PREPARATION

1. **Meet with your school administration** to request approval.
 2. **Organize a student team** that can conduct the survey. This can be a green team or a class.
 3. After you get principal approval, **consult with other key school staff members:**
 - **School aides and/or staff** manage the cafeteria and are key to leading any initiative in the cafeteria; keep them up to date with your plans!
 - **Custodial staff and School Food staff** manage waste at the end of the day; let them know that this survey is going to reduce the overall amount of trash and recyclables.
 4. **Set the date(s)** for your Cafeteria Plastic Survey(s)
 5. **Organize the supplies**
 - Cardboard boxes - 10 - 15
 - Gloves - 5 to 10 pairs
 - Tongs (optional) - 5 pairs
 - Tarp or floor cover for laying out all the plastic items (alternatively, use flattened cardboard boxes)
 - Cafeteria Plastic Survey Data sheet
 - Clipboards
 - Pencils (+ markers, optional)
 - Camera, iPad, or a phone to take photos
 6. **Meet with the student team or class** to review the procedure (for elementary students, you can lead a practice survey with props)
 7. **Remind the custodial staff about the date** and that your team will be assisting with sorting all the lunch waste.
- Ask them:
- Where is the **best spot for laying out the tarp** for sorting & photos?
 - Where do all the garbage bags go when you are finished.

B. DAY-OF SURVEY PREP

1. Start fresh! Empty all waste & recycling bins; no breakfast items remain.
2. Set up the waste station(s) for the survey. Place 3 (cardboard) boxes next to the trash bin with the following labels:
 - **plastic bags**
 - **chip bags and snack wrappers**
 - **juice pouches**
3. Place 1 box next to (or on top of) the recycling bin; label it
 - **other plastic recycling**
4. Label the recycling bin as: **milk cartons only**
(Trash bin will be labeled as usual; sort & count contents by item type)

We encourage you to do this for all lunch periods, but one lunch period works. If you are doing just one period or just your school in a co-located school building, take all the waste out from all the bins before each period you are surveying.

C. PROCEDURE -DURING LUNCH

1. Designate which waste station students will be monitoring
2. Student monitors oversee the waste station, helping their peers sort their waste and recyclables into the correct bins and boxes.
3. When students are finished eating, the monitors assist with proper sorting.

AFTER EACH LUNCH PERIOD

4. Empty each box by transferring sorted items into a separate container (or bag)
5. If your school has organics collection (compost), take all plastic items out of the organics (brown) bin.

AFTER ALL LUNCH PERIODS

6. Lay out the tarp
7. Count the number of each item category and fill data into survey sheet.



D. CREATE VISUAL DATA

Layout and Photo Tips:

- The biggest pile (i.e. chip bags and wrappers) should be placed in the front of tarp;
- Make sure you can see all the items clearly (bigger piles should not block any smaller ones)
- High angle shots work best (not birds-eye view; see example) to show all categories; and
- Use the DOE sorting signs on stands to help identify categories.

Challenge your team & have fun!

Can you find a more impactful way of using this visual data? For example, can all these items can be configured into a number, word, image, or puppet?