

Federal Way Schools FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

In the fall of 2025, all 37 Federal Way Public Schools launched cafeteria compost collection. City of Federal Way assisted with education and support at each school.



Are schools required to collect compost in the cafeteria?

Yes. Washington State law requires businesses (including schools) to compost. Although mandatory, it has many benefits such as reducing garbage, teaching students conservation, and creating new soil.

Why are schools composting?

A lot of waste is generated at school! U.S. students generate 14,500 tons of garbage **daily**- the same weight as 2,000 school buses. Each student wastes around 44 pounds of food at school each year.

Each year, Federal Way Public Schools will collect an estimated 1,300 cubic yards (280 tons) of food waste. That's the same volume as 14 school buses, and the same weight as 6 grey whales!

What goes in the compost?

School containers are color coded (**green for compost**, **blue for recycling**, grey for garbage) and labeled with photos of correct items.

The best starting point is to encourage composting of **food scraps** at the end of lunch.

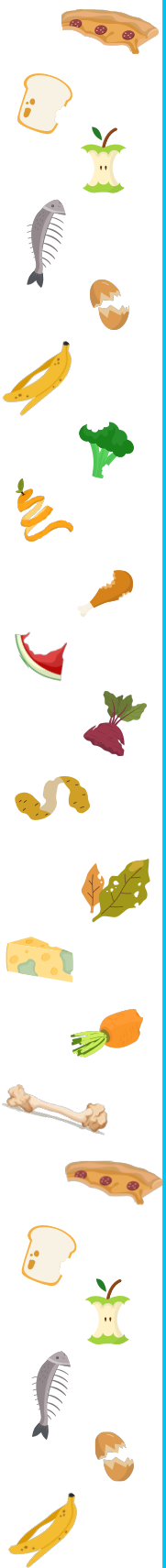
For a complete list of accepted items, visit wmnorthwest.com/FederalWay.

**Schools outside of Federal Way city limits should refer to their city's guidelines.*

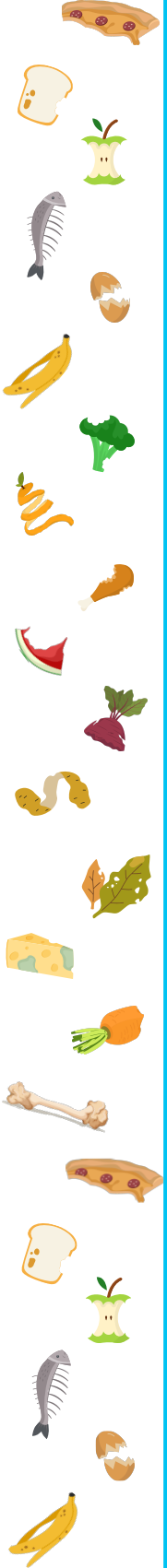
Food scraps + other compostable materials



- NO foam
- NO glass
- NO metal
- NO plastic
- NO straws
- NO tissues



Federal Way Schools FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Are students composting their food instead of eating?

No. Students are encouraged to finish their meals during lunch. Any scraps leftover at the end are composted, and unopened food added to lunchroom “share tables”.

Why are schools using plastic bags to collect compost?

Plastic bags make collection easier. Food scraps are emptied loose into outside carts and plastic bags are disposed in the garbage. For now, compostable bags are more expensive, less durable, and have a shorter shelf-life.



What happens to collected food scraps?



Food scraps are collected weekly, taken to local compost facilities, and turned into soil in as little as 8 weeks!

Who should staff contact if they need more signs or containers, or if they have issues with outdoor collection?

Contact FWPS District staff by speaking with the school’s head custodian.

What about recycling?

Recycling is still highly encouraged at schools- with an emphasis on bottles, cans, paper, and cardboard. Most lunchrooms have recycling for items like water bottles.



To avoid contamination, it’s recommended to have lidded recycling containers and to place recycling in in a separate area than the compost. Some items are labeled as recyclable (like straw wrappers) when they are actually garbage. Stick to the basics to prevent contamination and always check the labels on the recycling container. When in doubt, throw it out!

Where are more details about this program?

www.federalwaywa.gov/page/commercial-composting-resources

