

For Immediate Release

April 10, 2019

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Media Release

CCSD Rolls out Compostable Trays in all Cafeterias

Charleston, SC – Charleston County School District's (CCSD) Office of Nutrition Services launched a pilot program at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year to see if implementing compostable meal trays was feasible.

The success of the program at James B. Edwards Elementary School has resulted in a complete roll out to all district schools.

The trays will be used across PK-12 in addition to compostable plates currently being utilized in middle and high schools. Schools with dishwasher accessibility will resume utilizing real trays for meal service.

The pilot program was part of some brainstorming sessions between JBE teacher Nancy Platt, the school's Green Team Sponsor, and Suzanne Cottingham, the school's Nutrition Services Officer.

Platt began investigating the accessibility of compostable trays. Challenges for the Nutrition Services Department included vendor availability and pricing to make the move sustainable for the entire district - not just one school.

When Platt created a school wide green team, she started them on a mission to rid the school of styrofoam and plastic baggies. A third grader and green team member even spoke before Mount Pleasant Town Council before their vote to ban single-use plastic last year.

Previously, Platt and her husband hauled the trays to a grocery store for 'recycling' until she recently discovered that the store can't process styrofoam unless it's washed and dried.

Platt is so passionate about this endeavor that she'll be presenting CCSD's roll out at this year's Environmental Educators Association Summer Conference.

"With the plastics ban coming to Mount Pleasant it made sense to get ahead of the curve," said Cottingham. "The single-use plastics ban forced our hand, and we knew the entire tri-county area would eventually be moving in that direction."

Office of Strategy and
Communications

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Erica Taylor
Chief of Staff

Students were surveyed on three different types of test trays. The best fit was the five-compartment paper lunch tray.

"The strength of the tray, the ease of serving, and compostable vs. recyclable were all factors in choosing this product," said Cottingham. "This was more similar and comfortable to use for the students."

The Green Team helped with the survey talking to students during the test weeks to hear for themselves what did and didn't work. They also take shifts in front of the recycling, composting and trash barrels in the lunchroom to show students how to throw away their lunch garbage properly.

Styrofoam trays are also being phased out and replaced with alternative paper options such as "plaid food boats."

"Parents in Mount Pleasant were looking to see us move to a compostable, environmentally friendly product, especially with the looming single-use ban," said Cottingham. "Now that we have, we hope to build confidence and trust to in turn grow our meal participation."

Cottingham said this eliminates 2.9 million styrofoam trays from going to the landfill.

Nutrition Services Officer Joe Pettit said the product is made in a source facility from left-over pieces and is made from 100 percent recycled pre-consumer (repurposed) paper fiber.

The five-section lunch tray is called Chinet Sav-A-Day, and the plate is called Chinet PaperPro.

Environmental and Feature Checklist:

- Environmentally Friendly: YES
- Earth Friendly: YES
- Sustainable: YES
- Environmentally "Green": YES
- Made from 100% Recycled Pre-Consumer Paper Fiber: YES
- 100% Repurposed Material: YES
- 100% Compostable: YES
- Biodegradable & Compostable: YES

- Made in U.S.A.: YES
- Recycled Fiber Sourced 100% from the U.S.A.: YES
- Sturdy and holds up to the heaviest of wet and dry foods: YES

Fast Facts

- No trees are harvested for raw fiber material.
- No post-consumer recycled paper is used. Post-consumer material is prohibited from use in food contact products.
- For non-food contact, post-consumer recycled paper (newspaper) is used for beverage carriers and a host of other products.

"These molded paper fiber products are certified to meet the Biodegradable Products Institute 60-day-standard for biodegrading in a commercial composting facility," said Pettit. "The pre-consumer fiber is sourced in the United States in a facility in Waterville, Maine. The bi-product is from the stamping/trimming operation of the production of paper cups, containers, and milk and juice cartons."

"CCSD is the front-runner for school districts across the state in this effort to use compostable trays," said Cottingham. "We want to roll this out and highlight its success to essentially lower the cost per tray so other schools in the state may have the availability to benefit from the program as well."

For more information, contact Nutrition Services Officer, Suzanne Cottingham at suzanne_cottingham@charleston.k12.sc.us.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools that span 1,000 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 86 schools and specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.