Recycle a Ton in 2021!

Benton Middle School Tiger Library

Teens

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Free

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Byline

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Recycle a Ton in 2021! is Benton Middle School Tiger Library's successful community service recycling program.

The ability to pull off any type of community service project this year, during COVID, was a feat. To do it at a new middle school, on a new campus, with a new staff and students who had never stepped foot on this campus before this year, was unbelievable. This put the library as the center point, the gathering place, the hangout and the place with the answers. Fostering collaboration of our faculty and community is essential to the life of an exemplary library program.

This program was an opportunity to collaborate with classroom teachers, custodians, administration, students, faculty and community organizations, which was the whipped cream on top for a library program!

Advanced Planning

Planning this program from the ground up took much dedication from all of the above, working together with different parts taking on various responsibilities in order for it to run smoothly, effectively and safely. We started with an idea that grew into a program that not only met its original goal, but exceeded that goal. Additionally, it has become a part of our students vocabulary to speak about recycling.

We began by registering our school with PepsiCo Recycling. The Pepsi Recycling program has a plethora of lesson plans, ideas, contests and ways to earn points to purchase items needed such as recycling bins. PepsiCo supported our efforts by immediately sending six blue recycling bins and posters to display around our school.

The programs of this initiative include our Recycle Louisiana Community Project and our Benton Middle School Growth Mindset Initiative, both being school-wide. A recycling committee was formed from volunteers across our campus including teachers, staff members and custodians, with the Tiger Library being the hub. We were able to involve teachers across the campus in disseminating the recycling plan in more detail. Weekly lessons enable us to dig deeper posing questions to our students that have them think about the why.

I contacted the Bossier Parish Courthouse, which is approximately a mile from our middle school, and spoke with the Bossier Parish Police Jury Administrator, explaining our program and ensuring that we could utilize the paper/cardboard recycling containers located at the courthouse. He was extremely supportive and added that if we needed extra containers, they would support us in those efforts as well. He then connected me to the director of Keep Bossier Beautiful, stating that this was a program that they would love to support.

Brainstorming ideas with the director led to a school-wide Recycle LA Shoebox Mardi Gras Float contest utilizing only recyclables. Students created themed floats with prizes warded by Keep Bossier Beautiful. Four KBB board members judged the recycled shoebox floats using a rubric that our Recycling Committee created.

Marketing

Collaborating with our Bossier Parish Courthouse, Keep Bossier Beautiful, classes, students, custodians, staff, BMS social media outlets, the BMS app (which is seen daily by all parents/guardians, students, and staff), student recycle ambassadors and Tiger News TV (student-led) keeps everyone in the loop.

Budgeting

There was no cost to this program. We partnered with PepsiCoRecyling Program for supplies, ideas, lesson plans, marketing ideas, etc. This is a free program available to public schools.

Day-of-event Activity

Our classroom teachers send a "recycling ambassador" to send their class recycling to the blue bins on a weekly basis. Student ambassadors assist the custodians in loading the truck with the week's recycling.

Thus far, we have recycled 3,258 pounds of paper & cardboard. Our goal was 2,000 pounds by the end of the 2020-2021 school year. Many of our decisions this year were limited with all the COVID restrictions in place for public schools. We want to expand this next year after COVID restrictions are lifted to include parents/students in our car line taking the recyclables each week.

We measured success by setting a goal to "Recycle a Ton in 2021," tracking our weekly progress, communicating that progress to our campus through weekly updates and streamed announcements through TNT (our campus' version of the morning news.) A physical tracking goal chart hangs in the Tiger Library for all to see our growth as well.

We have already hit our goal of 2,000 pounds and surpassed it this month. Because of the COVID restrictions this year, we weren't allowed to involve our parents physically like the recycling committee had planned. Our administrators have been

as flexible as possible to ensure the recycling program was able to work for us during this school-ish year. They allowed and even came up with the ideas for the recycle ambassadors in each class, alleviating the need for too many students traveling the halls at the same time. Our admin also met with our custodians to make sure they were willing to help our campus transport the recyclables weekly to the courthouse.

Program Execution

Because of the COVID restrictions, we have even more boxes and such from deliveries. Recycling our cardboard and paper has alleviated the need for custodians to trash these items; instead, they are able to have a central place to gather them and get help from students and staff in collection purposes.

In addition, recycle ambassadors from each classroom help load the recyclables in order to transport them to our Bossier Courthouse Recycling bins. We have seen a huge uptick in students realizing that the piece of paper they normally just crumpled and threw in the trash can be just as easily put in the recycle bins. Post-it Notes are used for annotating in middle school guidebooks, and now when turning in those guidebooks into the library, we have noticed that students are thinking about how to recycle instead of just throwing them away.

Our school campus is in a rural area and therefore no recycling is offered for pick up. This means we have to work together to get our recycling to the courthouse, and in turn the courthouse works with us to ensure the bins are available. Another benefit of this has been students beginning to realize that if recycling is going to become more commonplace in our area, there also needs to be more convenient ways of picking up that recycling from schools, businesses and homes. Educating these middle schoolers about recycling and the benefits has pushed them to think forward about their future and how they want that to look.

Sitting in our classes today are our future city councilors, police jurors and mayors. These students can make change where it has been stagnant at the present time. Having a growth mindset helps you to be a forward thinker, which is a huge benefit personally for each student and for our environment.

Advice

The pandemic was a really difficult piece of the puzzle to work around. We will definitely work on additional components once we have the all-clear for normal activity in our school lives. One of the things we would like to change is to be able to involve the parents more. That way we could ensure that this is reaching into their homes as well as school. Also, we would like to be able to estimate, measure and weigh our recycling before taking it to the recycling bins. This would incorporate recycling even more in-depth in our curriculum, covering even more standards as well as instilling the need to help the earth.

Unexpected was the excitement over the Recycle LA Shoebox Float Contest. The students truly got into creating and building their floats to demonstrate Recycle LA via a Mardi Gras-themed, recycle materials-only contest. KBB used a rubric to judge the shoebox floats, which in turn led to them awarding a first-, second- and third-place prize to 7th and 8th graders. Those winning students also had a catered Chick-fil-A lunch with Mardi Gras King Cake for dessert in the Tiger Library the next day. This brought even more attention to the Tiger Library, and the students were thrilled to get to have lunch with us.

Relationships were built among our students and our community through Keep Bossier Beautiful's involvement throughout this initiative. We also were able to cultivate our relationships in the library. Collaborating across the campus provided an opportunity to work with all of the 7th and 8th grade teachers, adding another layer of cohesiveness to our campus culture.

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Supporting Materials

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- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

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Audiences:

Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
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