

Austin elementary schools expand composting program

By Niamh Marnell Friday, 27 August 2010

SOUTHWEST AUSTIN — Austin ISD and Texas Disposal Systems worked together to launch a new composting program at four of Southwest Austin's elementary schools last spring. On Aug. 30, AISD signed a contract with TDS to expand the program to include all 81 elementary schools in Austin.



Courtesy: Austin Independent School District

Composting is a way to manage and accelerate nature's decomposition of organic material. The compost can then be spread on soil to improve soil health.

The pilot program, implemented in Menchaca, Casey, Kocurek and Baranoff elementary schools, has proved successful with an average of nearly two tons of food waste per week being kept out of the landfill. If the program works as well across all 81 schools, it could divert more than 3 million pounds of waste from the landfill.

The program was born when TDS, which was already the solid waste provider for the schools, did a trash audit for AISD to look at ways the schools could better manage waste.

"So what we would do is reduce the amount of trash that's being taken from the school and increase the amount of compost taken from the school, and it would be the same amount of work for us but 40 percent would be diverted," said TDS spokesman Ryan Beard.

"There is an educational component to it," said Idella Wilson, AISD project facilitator. "[TDS] come[s] out and explain[s] to the students what's happening and it helps our students become better stewards," she said.

AISD elementary schools have staff members on hand to help students sort trash from compostable items.

"They love separating it; they don't even have to hand it over to the adult," Beard said. "They're like, '... this is the milk carton so we can put that in the compost but don't put the plastic in there,'" he said.

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