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PRESS RELEASE

Ocean Knoll students lead school to reduce plastic

Fifth and sixth grade students at Ocean Knoll Elementary in Encinitas are making a substantial impact on reducing single use plastics. Using skills of observation and collaboration they have led their school to change their behaviors and save 170,000 spork packets from entering the landfill from their school each year.

Their efforts, which began last spring, finally paid off last week when the school switched from using single-use film-wrapped spork packets containing a plastic spork and a napkin to dishwasher-safe silverware and a napkin dispenser. This simple change means a significant reduction in single-use plastics in a city increasingly focused on reducing plastic use.

Last spring students participating in the SWPPP Internship™ Program conducted a lunchtime “spork audit”. For one week, these environmentally-minded young people separated out and counted all of the used and unused spork packets thrown out during lunchtime at their school. They found on average 105 were going to the landfill each day from just their school, which serves lunch 180 days a year. Using their math skills, they calculated 170,000 single use plastic spork packets were going into the landfill each year just from Ocean Knoll Elementary!

The students gathered this data and presented it to the Encinitas Union School Board in May 2019 along with recommendations to switch to dishwasher-safe silverware and a napkin dispenser. Last week, these young leaders saw the result of their dedication pay off as custodian Will Brown, and EUSD Child Nutrition Director Lea Bonelli, rolled out silverware and napkin dispensers.

“Starting a new program can definitely come with some logistical challenges, but it’s been incredible how quickly the students at Ocean Knoll have adopted this change. From day one, students were excited and invested. We are very impressed by the leadership they are demonstrating in making meaningful changes to protect the environment.” - Lea Bonelli, Child Nutrition Director, Encinitas Union School District

This effort continues the robust work students are accomplishing in an effort toward becoming a school site environmental leader. These Ocean Knoll sustainability-focused students have eliminated plastic straws, reduced campus litter, improved stormwater quality, and have even tackled increasing natural lighting in all classrooms.

Much of this change has come about through the SWPPP Internship Program, a hands-on, STEM-based program focused on reducing pollution from school sites. This year, over 500 students are actively involved in SWPPP Internship Programs at their elementary, middle and high schools in California, Nevada and Hawaii.

Fifth grade SWPPP Intern Sarah Roach says, "I'm proud of the SWPPP interns who have worked hard to save the environment."

Timeline

March 2019 - Students conduct school-wide "spork audit"

May 2019 - Students present results and recommended changes to School Board

November 2019 - School switches to silverware

Key players

Head of Nutrition Services Lea Bonelli

EUSD Superintendent Andrée Grey, Ed.D.

Ocean Knoll Elementary School Principal Jennifer Bond

Ocean Knoll Custodian Will Brown

DATA

105 single use spork packets go to the landfill from Ocean Knoll every school day

Lunch served on 180 school days per year

= 18,900 single use spork packets going to the landfill from Ocean Knoll each year

x 9 schools in the district = 170,000 single use spork packets per year going to the landfill from EUSD schools alone.

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