PROJECT DESCRIPTION:
The Shawnee Mission School District school cafeteria waste diversion project began at Briarwood Elementary in 2008. This grassroots program serves as a model for waste diversion and food composting. Now 11 other district schools participate in this program. With support from parent-teacher associations, many schools have developed specialized programs to expand food composting, clean-paper recycling and combined recycling efforts.

As of Aug. 2012, the following 12 schools participated in the solid waste diversion program by composting and recycling in their classrooms and cafeterias: Benninghoven Elementary, Briarwood Elementary, Brookwood Elementary, Corinth Elementary, Indian Woods Middle School, Mill Creek Elementary School, Nieman Elementary School, Prairie Elementary, Rising Star Elementary, Shawnee Mission East High School, Tomahawk Elementary and Trailwood Elementary.

PROJECT GOALS:
- Growth and innovation in green initiatives in the Shawnee Mission School District, especially in the area of environmental education, composting and recycling
- Development of standards to measure and quantify the amount and type of waste being diverted
- Creation of a new pilot program to evaluate the levels of contamination in compost across the grade levels

COMMUNITY BENEFITS AND LESSONS LEARNED:
This project has led to measurable and tangible benefits for participating schools and the community. Since the inception of the SMSD Cafeteria Waste Diversion pilot program in late 2008, data from Missouri Organic Recycling and AbiBow Recycling reflect that participating schools diverted 334,800 pounds of biodegradable waste, 122,904 pounds of mixed recyclables and 404,928 pounds of paper from the landfill. Overall, these schools diverted 862,632 pounds or approximately 431 tons of waste from the landfill and raised almost $4,000 by recycling their paper in a three-year period. In Sept. 2012, the amount of cafeteria waste material collected from the 12 schools totaled approximately 11.5 tons, and in Oct. that amount increased to 12 tons of cafeteria waste.

In addition to these environmental benefits, the partnership with AbiBow Recycling provides financial incentives for the school district. AbiBow’s Paper Retriever program provides collection of clean paper and combined recycling, with payments made to schools based on the amount of clean paper they recycle. In 2010, Shawnee Mission schools received a total of more than $21,000. In 2011, schools received more than $22,300.

FUNDING SOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS:
Participating schools, the Shawnee Mission School District, Johnson County government, Kansas Green School Grant program, Missouri Organic Recycling, AbiBow Recycling and Deffenbaugh partnered to divert school solid waste from the landfill while promoting educational programs focused on sustainability. These efforts helped the program grow from Briarwood Elementary to 12 schools in the Shawnee Mission School District.

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