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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Longmont's Central Elementary 5th Graders Lead School to Victory in Waste-Free Lunch Contest

Students reduce lunch trash by 96%, a new record for the 10th annual contest

Boulder County, CO (December 11, 2012) — Longmont's Central Elementary was declared this year's winner of the Eco-Cycle Waste-Free Lunch Contest, with as little as one pound of lunch trash produced by all 342 students!

"I think our school is amazing at being waste-free! We eliminated 96% of our waste! That's amazing for us. Waste-free is the way to be!" exclaimed Sofia. "I believe that it is important to be an eco-friendly person and part of an eco-friendly school at this time, and that is why I am proud to be part of the winning school," added Torin. Both Sofia and Torin are 5th graders at Central Elementary. They and their fifth grade classmates took the lead and led their school to victory by monitoring the cafeteria's recycling bin, compost bin and trash can. They also gave short talks to the other classes about how to pack a waste-free lunch from home, using their own lunches as examples.

The contest, which aims to encourage lunchtime waste-reduction strategies in schools, challenges students in Boulder County to apply the 3 Rs—Reduce, Reuse, Recycling—plus composting, directly to their lunches. This year, seven schools participated: Burlington Elementary (Longmont), Erie Elementary (Erie), Hygiene Elementary (Hygiene), Superior Elementary (Superior), Central Elementary, Coal Creek Elementary (Louisville) and Escuela Bilingue Pioneer (Lafayette). The program is funded annually by the Boulder County Resource Conservation Division and the Town of Superior paid for Superior Elementary's participation.

Why the focus on lunch trash? According to Eco-Cycle, lunch is the biggest garbage-producing activity during the school day. About one-third of our nation's waste is packaging, and much of that is food packaging. "All of those little bags, boxes and wrappers add up to a lot of waste and natural resource use," said Cyndra Dietz, Eco-Cycle's School Recycling and Environmental Education Programs Manager. "The good news is we have seen a major increase in the amount of reusable lunch bags, water bottles and containers that kids are bringing to school. The Waste-Free Lunch Contest is designed to encourage this, and it's clearly having a positive effect."

"I was surprised how much trash is thrown away," commented Audrey, a Central Elementary 5th grader, referring to the amount of lunch room trash they had when Eco-Cycle staff weighed it before the start of the contest. For five days during the contest, students packed food in reusable containers, avoided single-use packages, recycled cans, bottles, cartons and juice boxes and took leftover food back home.



Four of the participating schools, including Central Elementary, opted to set up monitored compost bins in the lunchroom, drastically reducing the contents of the trash cans. “It is amazing how little trash there was in the trash can when we were composting,” said Elijah, also a 5th grader. “I think every single school should have a compost bin, because it helps out by not filling the landfill with our food waste,” added Dylan.

During the contest, Eco-Cycle staffers return on two unscheduled, surprise visits to weigh the trash again. The two contest-day weights are averaged, compared to the pre-contest weight, and the school with the largest reduction per capita – Central Elementary – won.

Teachers at Central Elementary attribute the school’s success to the diligent work of the staff, students and parents. Committed parents volunteered to take the several bags of food waste collected each day for composting to the Longmont Waste Diversion Center. “The students made this work,” said Central’s Head Custodian Bob Glassner. “The lunch box waste seemed to shrink as the week went on, indicating that students were taking the project home to inform parents.”

“If you try to compost or recycle, you will be amazed at what you can do for the Earth,” said Lexie, also a 5th grader at Central Elementary.

As the contest winner, Central Elementary will receive \$400 to spend on environmentally-friendly products for the school. The runners-up, Escuela Bilingue Pioneer and Coal Creek Elementary, which both had 87% waste elimination, will receive \$100.

For more information about Eco-Cycle and our schools programs, visit www.ecocycle.org.
