

CASE STUDY:

Bedford Public Schools



PROFILE

Name:

Bedford Public Schools

Location:

Bedford, MA

On-site Dining: Yes**Take-out:** No**Warewashing:**

Commercial Dishwashers

Employees: 4 staff per

cafeteria, one waste monitor daily (volunteer/ intern/employee)

Bedford Public Schools, located in Bedford, Massachusetts, serve approximately 2,500 students across four schools: Lt. Eleazer Davis Elementary (PK-2), Lt. Job Lane Elementary (3-5), John Glenn Middle School (6-8), and Bedford High School (9-12). Approx 1,400 lunches are served daily across the district.

Thanks to a generous donation from PlasticFreeRestaurants.org, the schools' polystyrene (foam) lunch trays were traded for Ahimsa stainless steel reusable trays in December 2024. This was the final phase of a district-wide cafeteria waste reduction program; since 2023, the district has implemented a food share table, and separating recycling, food scraps, and liquids from true trash.

Changes to serviceware for less waste and more savings:

Single-use expanded polystyrene 5-compartment tray	→	Durable stainless-steel 5-compartment tray
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BEFORE and AFTER: Bedford school district has removed all expanded polystyrene trays from school cafeterias replacing them with GreenScreen Certified Ahimsa stainless-steel trays.



THE BOTTOM LINE

- \$11,777.40 total annual net cost savings
- 261,720 disposable items reduced per year
- Almost 3 tons (5,796lbs) of annual waste reduction
- Return on investment in one school calendar year
- \$20,700 per year estimated savings in waste-hauling fees

RESULTS

			PACKAGING IMPACTS			COST IMPACTS	
School	Disposable Product Replaced or Minimized	Recommendation Implemented	Percent Disposable Reduction	Annual Quantity of Disposable Product Reduced	Annual Waste Reduction (lbs.)	Payback* Period (months)	Annual NET** Cost Savings After Payback Period (\$)
Davis Elementary	Genpak Foam 5-compartment tray	Stainless-Steel Ahimsa Tray	100%	69,480	1,737	9	\$3,126.60
Lane Elementary	Genpak Foam 5-compartment tray	Stainless-Steel Ahimsa Tray	100%	60,480	1,512	9	\$2,721.60
John Glenn Middle School	Genpak Foam 5-compartment tray	Stainless-Steel Ahimsa Tray	100%	51,480	1,287	9	\$2,316.60
Bedford High School	Genpak Foam 5-compartment tray	Stainless-Steel Ahimsa Tray	100%	80,280	2,007	9	\$3,612.60
			TOTALS:	261,720 pieces	5,796 lbs.	9 months	\$11,777.40

*Note that Bedford School District was supplied with trays to cover 110% of the meals served. A one-to-one replacement would result in an 8.3-month payback period.

**Net Cost Savings considers any upfront and ongoing costs associated with the purchase and care of reusable items and capital improvements needed to carry out ReThink Disposable's recommendations. Net cost savings are based on avoided disposable foodware purchases.

“Our overall transition from Styrofoam to reusable stainless steel trays was seamless. Our staff and students made the change simple. It is great to have such a significant decrease in our trash output.”

Tom Houle, Food Services Director

“In the Lane school, we have gone from 18 bags of trash a lunch day down to 6. The reusable trays have vastly reduced the amount of garbage thrown out and have actually streamlined the whole lunchtime custodial operation.”

Sam Martin, Lead Custodian

“Bedford Public Schools and their staff were the poster children for how smooth a transition to reuse can be. They provided every scrap of information and data we requested, had all decision-makers on-board, and made every decision of ours an easy one. From first outreach to the ordering of their stainless steel trays was a mere fifteen days!”

John Charles Meyer,
Plastic Free Restaurants

ReThink Disposable is a program of Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund conducted in partnership with local organizations, businesses, and government agencies. Generous support is provided by a changing list of public and private funders. To learn more about the program, its partners, and funders, visit: www.rethinkdisposable.org

