

Guest Blogger Jenny: Waste Not, Want Not?

Description



So here I am again, in the plastics section of the market, selecting more small, single sized, "reusable" plastic containers. It's my third such trip in the last month. And it's all for the sake of the environment.

How can buying plastic be good for the environment? Great question! There were many changes that came with switching from public to private school, but one of the most unexpected changes was the school's "Waste-Free Program." This program demands that the campus be as "waste-free" as possible. That means nothing disposable should be brought to campus. That's quite a change from public school, where (although I didn't purchase them), Lunchables were popular and the school sold Sun Chips.

"Waste-Free" sounds reasonable enough, in theory. In practice, however, the logic gets way fuzzier. The idea of a "waste-free" lunch was easy enough: Anna* buys her hot lunch on campus every day, and the catering company takes care of the waste part. That's been a welcome relief; if your kid hates sandwiches and longs for hot food, the private school's hot lunch program is a dream come true (and, serving salads and fruit, way more nutritious than you might think).

No, itâ€™s the snack that really screws the whole plan up. Think about it: most â€œsnackâ€• food is either pre-packaged or is easy to stuff into little plastic baggies (hey, Iâ€™d even opt for a paper bag). But when a school institutes a â€œwaste-freeâ€• policy, the kids are told they canâ€™t throw *anything* away (a friendâ€™s daughter even freaked over taking a banana, because, after all, sheâ€™d have to throw the peel away). Thus, those little individually-sized reusable plastic containers come into play. And that would be fine, if kids (at least my kid) didnâ€™t lose the little individually-sized plastic containers at a shocking rate (many parents experience the same thing regarding those \$20 a pop SIGG bottles). How often are these containers â€œreused?â€• Iâ€™d say the record is about five times, before vanishing into the same parallel universe that houses single socks and lost ballpoint pens.

Far be it from me to deride the schoolâ€™s excellent intentions. And they are excellent; who wouldnâ€™t want less waste and less trash on campus? The school has done an admirable job recycling plastic bottles and sending the proceeds to a Global Buddies Program in South Africa. You canâ€™t argue with such laudable goals.

Yet, every morning when I ponder the snack supply, and often realize once again that the container supply is back to zero, Iâ€™m fraught with the anxiety of the absurd. Send my child to school with no snack and leave her with plummeting blood sugar. Send my child to school with a snack in the verboten plastic baggie, and have her risk reprisal. And then thereâ€™s the irony when I do have the right container: that every time my kid misplaces her plastic snack container, thatâ€™s more plastic tossed into the world that wonâ€™t get reused or recycled. Itâ€™s transformed from â€œwaste-freeâ€• to â€œwaste-ful,â€• in an instant.

So be aware: private school sometimes means dealing with policies and practices that, while well intentioned, arenâ€™t always effective. In the end, I guess itâ€™s better if Anna ends up hyper-conscious about waste and recycling, rather than oblivious.

Jenny Heitz has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. Her daughter started 4th grade at Mirman School this year. She previously attended 3rd St. Elementary School. Jenny has been published recently in the Daily News. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).

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