

NEWS RELEASE

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Hailey Elementary School Continues Successful Compost Program

- Hailey Elementary diverted over 2,500 lbs. of organic waste in spring of 2023 from the landfill through their school-wide composting program
- Partnered with Sun Valley Institute for Resilience, Clear Creek and Winn's Compost, the program will continue in the 2023-24 school year
- 5th grade student leaders participated in Compost Crew, instructing younger students on how to sort trash from organic material into the compost bin
- The program aims to serve as a model for other schools in the district and inspire them to increase sustainability efforts

Hailey, ID – Hailey Elementary School launched a school-wide composting program in January of 2023 that successfully diverted over 2,500 lbs. of food waste from landfills to Winn's Compost facility in Ohio Gulch. After every lunchtime, 5th graders in the "Compost Crew" and the custodial staff helped over 300 students sort leftover food and organic materials into the green compost bin. Special Education teacher Sarah Polk was inspired to start a compost program after observing lunchtime habits over her 18-year tenure with the Blaine County School District.

"Schools produce a lot of waste each day. It was unbelievable to me how much food was wasted daily," says Polk. "Students were throwing a lot of their school or home packed lunches in the garbage. Seeing this inspired me to look into reducing the amount of waste that we were sending to the landfill."

In the fall of 2022, Polk worked alongside Sun Valley Institute for Resilience (SVIR) to design a compost program to accommodate the large volume of compostable material being thrown into trash bins every day. Through adjusted PTA funds, Clear Creek transported food scraps to Winn's Compost every week.

SVIR facilitated meetings with 5th graders and the Compost Crew through their 5B Resilient program, which strives to empower everyday climate action in Blaine County. Compost Crew

members made signs and educational videos as part of the program launch. Throughout the school year, all students gained understanding and confidence about the importance of decreasing food waste. In addition to in-school composting, students started taking home leftover food when possible.

“Lasting change in our school systems requires cultural buy-in from students, faculty, staff, and parents. For any new program to succeed, the ‘why’ for students needs to be clear from the beginning,” says SVIR Program Coordinator Hannah Harris. “Students were enthusiastic to engage with the compost program in part because we centered conversations around stewardship for our school communities and our planet. We also intentionally included students in fun creative aspects of the program.”

As the 2023-24 school year begins, incoming 5th graders will have the chance to join Compost Crew, and students will continue to sort and weigh diverted organic matter every day at lunch. “I would love to see all schools composting,” added Polk, “but details need to be figured out before it’s realistic.”

Community composting programs can significantly decrease carbon emissions and contribute to a more resilient regional food system in the Wood River Valley. Sun Valley Institute for Resilience’s 5B Resilient program staff are available to help launch compost programs at other Valley schools. Reach out to inquiries@sunvalleyinstitute.org to find out more.

About Sun Valley Institute for Resilience

5B Resilient is a program of the Sun Valley Institute for Resilience (SVIR). SVIR advances community resilience in Idaho’s Wood River Valley region by educating, investing and collaborating to ensure that the economy, environment and people thrive. SVIR is dedicated to supporting our whole community and we are working to develop programs that meet everyone’s needs. For more information, please visit: www.sunvalleyinstitute.org