



# School Food Donation & Composting Efforts

## What questions did the review look at?

- ▶ How effectively is New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) reducing food waste through donation and composting programs?

## Why does it matter for New Yorkers?

New York City public schools serve almost a million meals every day, making schools one of the City's largest sources of food waste. Programs that donate uneaten food and redirect food scraps for composting can reduce waste sent to landfills. This, in turn, can help lower greenhouse gas emissions and provide critical aid to New Yorkers who may be experiencing food insecurity.

The review found that while NYCPS has made efforts to expand donation and composting programs citywide, school participation remains troublingly low. The review found that only 37% of food scraps were captured for composting, and contamination rates were far higher than citywide averages. The review also found that donation efforts are limited, with only 4% of schools donating food to outside organizations in FY2025.

Without stronger food waste prevention, schools will continue sending large amounts of edible food and compostable material to disposal sites, instead of putting those resources to good use. Improving donation, composting, training, and data collection could support the City's sustainability goals and help ensure more food reaches communities in need.

## What changes did the agency commit to make following the review?

- ▶ NYCPS agreed to continue encouraging school principals to participate in food waste prevention programs, including food donation. It also agreed to continue providing support to schools through educational training.
- ▶ NYCPS agreed to identify schools that do not have appointed sustainability coordinators and ensure that these positions are filled.

## REVIEW FINDINGS



NYCPS has established and expanded food waste prevention programs.



NYCPS only captured 37% of food scraps for composting.



Compost collected from schools had a 28% organics contamination rate (compared to the citywide rate of 4%).



Only 4% of schools donated food to outside organizations.



Review Recommendations	Agency Response
<b>1</b> Establish NYCPS-wide targets for participation in composting, food donation, and other programs established to reduce food waste.	<b>DISAGREED</b>
<b>2</b> Compile NYCPS-wide data to support the assessment of progress against such targets.	<b>DISAGREED</b>
<b>3</b> Conduct and publish the results of a centralized assessment of progress—by school and by program—identify barriers to progress and develop strategies for improvement.	<b>DISAGREED</b>
<b>4</b> Develop NYCPS-wide training and outreach programs to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase participation in all NYCPS food waste reduction programs;</li> <li>2. Encourage information and idea sharing, and create opportunities for collaboration, amongst sustainability coordinators across the school system;</li> <li>3. Improve the percentage of food waste that is captured as potential compost.</li> <li>4. Reduce contamination to ensure that what is captured is compostable.</li> <li>5. Conduct on-site visits to schools to verify that they comply with the composting and recycling requirements by having recycling and composting bins properly placed in cafeterias and classrooms.</li> </ol>	<b>PARTIALLY AGREED<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>5</b> Identify schools that do not have appointed sustainability coordinators and ensure these positions are filled and provide strong support to the new coordinators.	<b>AGREED</b>

<sup>1</sup> NYCPS stated that it partially agrees with this recommendation and that it will continue to encourage all school principals to participate in the food donation programs, implement share tables and develop and foster partnership opportunities for sustainability coordinators and other school stakeholders to network, share information, and exchange ideas. NYCPS stated that its primary goal is to have minimal food waste and ensure proper composting, and that it will continue to provide support to schools through educational training and visits from OES staff.