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What the fork? Campaign aims at getting rid of high school plastic utensils

By Sora O'Doherty



Members of the Campolindo Zero Waste Club, from left, top row to bottom row: Erin Thomas, Sahana Rajesh, Maddie House, Chloe Dawkins, Ben Powers, Anika Johnson, Ella Seaman, Melissa Dunbar, Mabel Vo, Erika Reidel, Lexi Oxanizo, Ava Sparacio Photo Gracie Woidat, Campolindo La Puma

Mabel Vo, president and founder of the Zero Waste Club at Campolindo High School, has collected about 500 metal forks to replace the plastic ones used on campus that wind up in the landfill. A similar plan last year was successful at Burton Valley Elementary School in Lafayette.

Vo says that she wants to see the schools transition away from all plastic utensils. She is working on developing a plan with the schools. In her vision, students who eat their lunch in or near to the school cafeteria could use metal utensils, and return them to the cafeteria after their meals. For students who perhaps eat too far from the cafeteria to return utensils before returning to class, she envisions the use of compostable utensils, such as those made of bamboo.

Vo started the Zero Waste Club at Campolindo this academic year. She previously did a project at the Rheem Center to set up recycling bins. She worked with advisor Jay Lifton and Joan Bruzzone on the pilot program, which she says went really well. So her second project is to provide metal forks for Campolindo, Miramonte, Acalanes and Las Lomas high schools.

Why just forks? Well, actually the Zero Waste Club would like to get rid of all plastic utensils.

It is estimated that Campolindo, Miramonte, Acalanes, and Las Lomas together are disposing of 72,000 plastic forks every year. The estimated annual cost for the Acalanes Union High School District to send the plastic forks to the landfill comes out to be about \$1,248. The club met their goal of collecting about 500 forks for the program by the end of January as well as raising \$675 in donations from the community.

Nancy Hu, vice chair of the Lafayette Environmental Task Force and mother to two young sons, was excited to see students taking charge and using their collective voice to reduce plastic usage in schools and donated to the project. "I hope Lafayette's residents and businesses are listening to the students," she said. The Environmental Task Force is also working on an ordinance which targets single-use plastic foodware, such as utensils and straws.

"Under the current draft of our ordinance, which has still to go to the city council, compostable fiber foodware would still be compliant. However, we do recognize that reusable foodware would be ideal, especially for dine-in situations. With the currently proposed 25 cent disposable cup fee, we not only hope residents will start to bring their own cups, but also we hope businesses will offer customers the option to consume beverages and foods in real reusable cups, bowls, and plates with silverware if they choose to stay and dine-in. Reusables have a real cost savings benefit, and it's time we start rethinking our disposable culture and the havoc it has wreaked on our planet," Hu said.

Last year Julian Jackl was recognized for his work as a fifth-grader at Burton Valley Elementary School to eliminate single-use plastic utensils, replacing them instead with metal cutlery.

(Read about Jackl in the April 17 Lamorinda Weekly archives). As a result of his dedication other schools have been inspired to do the same.

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