

# CASE STUDY: Bishop O'Dowd High School

**ReThink  
Disposable**  
STOP WASTE BEFORE IT STARTS

## PROFILE

**Location:** Oakland, CA  
**Student Population:** 1,156  
**Food Vendor:** Epicurean Group  
**Food Services:** Breakfast, Snack and Lunch  
**Number of Meals Served a Day:** 450  
**Length of School Year:** 37 weeks  
**Ware Washer:** No

**Bishop O'Dowd High School** is a high school of 1,156 students located in Oakland. Cafeteria dining services are operated by Epicurean Group, with a strong sustainable food mission; however, food is served on disposable products. Although historically, the campus had reusable foodware and dishwashing capacity in the kitchen, the infrastructure was removed in the mid nineties and replaced with disposables. Today Epicurean serves an average of 450 students per day during a breakfast, snack and lunch service over the course of a 37 week school year.



## PACKAGING PRACTICES prior to *ReThink Disposable*

➔ **All breakfast, snack, and lunch food was served on two sizes of disposable plates**

Clean Water Fund (CWF) intended to transition all dining services from disposables to reusable foodware, but after touring the space and discussions with the food vendor and facilities, the school determined that the addition of a commercial dishwasher would require costly capital improvements. Bishop O'Dowd High School decided to replace two sizes of disposable plates that are used to serve all meals with a reusable basket. Reusable baskets were selected because they are inexpensive, light and easy to transport around, and do not get very soiled due to the liner. Todd Morales, the head Chef from Epicurean, felt confident that many, if not most of the meals he serves day-to-day, could be serviced by a reusable basket.



## IMPLEMENTATION

CWF's *ReThink Disposable* team conducted a baseline audit and found that during the 37 week school year, 123,719 disposable plates are used at a cost of \$8,991.48. The waste generation for these plates totals 4,701 lbs (2.35 tons) per year. The school purchased 504 baskets at a cost of \$531.67. Dirty basket collection points were placed strategically around the dining hall. Every day, Chef Todd made the decision to use the clean and lined baskets for any meal that can work in a basket for lunch service ONLY. Epicurean staff collected dirty baskets from collection points to wash, rinse, soak and sanitize the baskets using the three sink system in the kitchen.



Trained students from the Students for Sustainability Club stood by the basket collection points and reminded students not to throw away their baskets and to sort out their food scraps first and then stack baskets in the bus tubs. The *ReThink Disposable* team returned one month later and conducted the follow-up audit to track the new disposable plate usage to calculate waste reduction and cost saving.



**Chef Todd Morales:** *"I think it has been a success and will go a long way towards reducing landfill waste and show alternatives to disposables not only to the adults but as well as the kids who go to school here."*

## OUTCOMES

Recommendation	Products Replaced or Minimized	% Disposable Reduction	Payback Period	Annual Savings (after payback period)	Annual Waste Reduction
Replace disposable plate with reusable basket	9-inch Round Plate	81%	21 days	\$6,415	3,339 lbs.
Replace disposable plate with reusable basket	9-inch Oval Plate	8%	0 days	\$44	37 lbs.
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$6,459</b>	<b>3,376 lbs.</b>

## THE BOTTOM LINE

- \$6,459 annual reduction in disposable foodware costs after payback period
- 3,376 pounds (1.69 tons) of waste reduced annually
- Improved presentation of food
- Students practice daily sustainable behavior choices

## LESSONS LEARNED

Replacing disposables with reusables can be as simple as selecting one or two big ticket service items and replacing them with reusable product alternatives. In this case, the school did not have to invest in a costly commercial dishwasher, nor did they incur additional labor costs for collecting and washing the reusable baskets.

The pilot project began with 504 plates, but due to loss, breakage and students simply leaving the baskets around campus wherever they ate instead of bringing them back to the bus tubs, only 296 baskets remained at the end of the pilot project reflecting a 41% loss. It is estimated that 50% of baskets would need to be replaced every semester unless better infrastructure combined with education is implemented. The cost of replacing 50% of the reusable baskets every semester that are lost or damaged was factored into the program impacts calculation as an “ongoing cost.” Students tend to leave their litter and baskets, in this case, anywhere around campus that they chose to eat. To reduce product loss, CWF recommended more collection units be placed around campus at common eating areas far from the dining room and increased training for the student body and facilities staff. Groundskeepers and janitors

need training to collect baskets that may have been littered around campus to deposit into a collection point behind the kitchen. Students would do a better job of returning baskets with increased education and additional collection units.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND

The results were achieved during this pilot project suggest that continuation and expansion of the program would achieve even greater waste reduction and cost savings. Use of the baskets could be expanded to breakfast service, staff lunch, and special event catering.

CWF identified other disposable products that could be transitioned to reusables. Chef Todd fully supports the goal to expand their reusable foodware options, but finds this to be impossible without infrastructure improvements in the kitchen, including a water and energy efficient dishwasher, and some additional storage.



ReThink Disposable is a Clean Water Fund program conducted in partnership with local businesses and government agencies. Generous support for the program 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](http://www.rethinkdisposable.org).



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