

“Children are our future,” as song tells says, but at Whitehouse School in Whitehouse Station, the students are also engaged in creating our future. Hopefully, this will be a better, kinder future for our planet. In partnership with the Readington Township Environmental Commission, the third-grade leadership club called Student Voice is initiating an environmentally-minded program called the Trex Challenge.

The Trex Company began a friendly competition over a decade ago to encourage communities to recycle plastic film wrapping and bags. WHS Student Voice and the Environmental Commission have set a goal of collecting 500 pounds of polyethylene plastic by this summer to keep it from winding up in landfills, as it is not currently recycled by the county.

Student Voice advisors Lori Yukniewicz and Valerie Zanardi were very pleased with the Environmental Commission’s enthusiasm to collaborate with the third graders. “The commission actually stopped their meeting on Tuesday, January 28th, to give a round of applause when we listed all the environmental programs Whitehouse School students and staff participate in on a daily basis,” recounted Zanardi. “Both groups have a mutual love for the Earth.”

Whitehouse School has earned the distinction of being a U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School, as well as being a multi-year recipient of the N.J. Sustainable Schools highest award. To aid these green missions, Student Voice members collect food from the lunchroom and place it in a three-year compost bin. The third-grade leadership club also solicits shampoo bottles and beauty packaging for a TerraCycle program, as well as printer cartridges for yet another recycling venture.

Teacher, Melissa Truempy, coordinates with the Rutgers Master Gardeners to facilitate a Seeds to Salad experience in one of the two sensory gardens found at the elementary school. Each grade level is responsible for some aspect of the growing cycle: germinating seeds, planting sprouts, weeding, and watering with collected rainwater. All students then participate in a school-wide harvest.

For this latest challenge, Student Voice members will gather and weigh the plastic collected at the school and then deliver it to a designated drop-off point. This polyethylene will be recycled into composite products such as Trex decking. The Environmental Commission will handle materials collected at the Municipal building. Neil Hendrickson, chair of the Environmental Commission, “ _____.”

Students encourage the whole community to help with the challenge. Please bring your plastic film to the bin outside the Municipal Building at 509 Route 523, Whitehouse Station. The following plastic is salvageable: grocery and retail bags, Ziplocs, case overwraps, bread bags, bubble wrap, newspaper sleeves, and dry cleaning bags. All plastic must be empty and dry.

Sustainability of the planet is the supreme goal but, as an incentive, if Readington Township is able to deliver 500 pounds of polyethylene by summer, Whitehouse School will earn a Trex bench for its sensory garden. Whitehouse School’s eco-friendly students and the Environmental Commission are united in improving our community and world!