

Five Easy Steps to a Bottle Free School

Eliminating bottled water will benefit your school in a multitude of ways. Planning and clean up for events will be simplified, the volume of waste will decrease, parents will save money, students will learn to live more sustainably, and your school's environmental impact will be reduced. So how do you go about establishing a **bottle free school**? Here are five steps to completely eliminating bottled water from student lunches, classroom parties and other school sponsored events:

1. Establish a bottled water policy for your school, group, or municipality

Meet with your Board of Education, your school PTOs and/or your mayor to inform them about the staggering waste associated with bottled water. Review the compelling facts such as: bottled water is 1000 times more expensive than tap water, requires 800 times more energy to produce, and results in 100 million bottles going to landfills every day in the USA, to name a few. Use our [facts](#) or show them our [educational video](#) to get the message across quickly and clearly. At the conclusion of your meeting, help the group reach a consensus on a district-wide policy regarding bottled water.

2. Communicate the bottled water policy

Explain why bottled water is a problem and how families can save money and reduce their waste by using reusable bottles and tap water. The bottled water policy should be explained in each school newsletter and on the school district website and by live presentations at PTO meetings, faculty meetings, and administrative meetings. Have teachers show the Back2Tap [educational video](#) in their classrooms.

3. Encourage reusable bottles

Remind students, teachers, parents, and other visitors to the school to bring their own **reusable bottles** or mugs to school each day and to all special events. Consider having a [reusable bottle fundraiser](#) or simply issuing **school water bottles** to every student. **Custom water bottles** with the school logo are a big hit with students. Make sure the bottles are labeled with name and contact information in permanent ink to avoid bottle confusion. Encourage student's co-operation by issuing incentives such as awards for classes with the most **reusable water bottles**, for classes with the lowest number of disposable beverage containers, or for individuals with the coolest **reusable bottle**.



4. Make tap water accessible

Provide access to tap water throughout the school by maintaining water fountains and cleaning them daily. Better yet, upgrade to [bottle-less water coolers](#) that supply chilled filtered tap water in order to allay concerns about the spreading of germs at water fountains and to improve the taste of the tap water, if necessary. Bottle-less water coolers could be funded by holding a stainless steel bottle fundraiser.

The quality of the tap water is an important issue to address upfront. Many people don't realize that tap water is more closely regulated than bottled water. Overseen by the EPA, the vast majority of public water supplies are excellent. This can be confirmed by checking local water

quality reports on the EPA [safe drinking water webpage](#). School districts with old buildings should conduct independent water testing to make sure no lead is leaching from old pipes. Bottle-less water coolers are definitely recommended for schools with water quality issues.

Bottle-less water coolers are hooked up to an existing water line in the building, and they filter and chill tap water before it is dispensed. This type of system is more cost-effective than standard coolers with bottles and is far more eco-friendly. New filters are required annually, and frequent disinfection of the dispenser spouts and overflow tray by local custodial staff is required. These water coolers can be placed on each floor of the school or in the cafeteria, or both. Schools may want to install a filtration system at the sink in the teachers lounge so that teachers may enjoy great tasting filtered tap water, too.



5. Provide beverage serving and storage containers

Supply containers for serving tap water or tap water-based beverages in classrooms and other venues to the teachers, administrators, and PTO leaders. One gallon pitchers can be filled at faucets or water coolers and used to refill reusable **school water bottles** in the classrooms. Using a pitcher, large 2 or 5 gallon portable coolers can be filled from faucets or water coolers for serving tap water-based beverages to large crowds at special events. If a variety of drinks need to be served or an especially large number of people, several large coolers may be required.

Have a limited number of biodegradable disposable cups on hand for those who forget their reusable bottles. Provide a recycling bin where they can be collected. For the few (hopefully) disposable plastic bottles that may accumulate, be sure to provide recycling bins throughout your facility, located prominently during special events.



Bottle free bliss

All in all, becoming a bottle free school is not as daunting as it sounds. Putting resources like reusable bottles, water coolers, portable coolers, and pitchers in place is easier and cheaper than you'd expect. Then the key to getting cooperation from the community will be establishing and communicating the school-wide bottled water policy and letting everyone know how to efficiently utilize those resources.

The author, Lydia Chambers, is co-founder of [Back2Tap](#), a social business that educates people about the wastefulness of disposable plastic bottles and bags and sells stainless steel bottles, sandwich wraps, and fair-trade organic cotton bags with custom logos for [group fundraising](#) online and in bulk.