

## **IWMA Strategic Plan: TK-12 School District Stakeholder Engagement Meeting**

Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 9:00 AM – 10:00 AM

📍 IWMA Office, 555 Chorro St, Ste. D2, San Luis Obispo, CA

### Attendees:

- *Coby Skye, Executive Director, SLO IWMA*
- *Lucy Stanus, Deputy Director, SLO IWMA*
- *Michael Williams, Program Manager, SLO IWMA*
- *Ashley Kuder, Program Coordinator, SLO IWMA*
- *Mike di Milo, Owner, Science Discovery*
- *Jessie Wesch, Director of Food and Nutrition Services, Paso Robles Joint Unified School District*
- *John Litten, Custodial Supervisor, Paso Robles Joint Unified School District*

### Notes:

#### 1. Introductions and Current Waste Reduction Efforts

IWMA contracts with Science Discovery to conduct educational outreach at schools throughout SLO County. Mike di Milo described Science Discovery's programming including a robust classroom education program which included 204 classroom programs delivered to Paso Robles Unified students over the past two years. There is also a food waste reduction assembly program provided by Science Discovery; however, it historically has low demand. Mike expressed that this might be because schools have not yet implemented food waste collection in the cafeterias.

Paso Robles Unified School District serves 6,500 kids at 11 schools; this translates to 3,100 breakfasts, 3,600 lunches, and 1,000 snacks served daily. Jessie Wesch and John Litten discussed the district's wins and challenges surrounding waste diversion. Wins included vermicomposting in school gardens, a recycling club for older students, share-tables in cafeterias, and edible food recovery with the SLO Food Bank. Cafeterias operate using the offer-vs-serve model, which helps reduce waste through student choice of meal options. Paso Robles Unified is also working to expand their farm-to-school and scratch-cooking offerings in the cafeteria which can also contribute to waste reduction.

Challenges for Paso Robles Unified include bin contamination, specifically at the high school level. Green bins are not yet deployed in cafeterias district wide. Bin placement relies on trial and error; custodial staff change placement often based on their assessment of contamination or low use.

The school district has not yet been able to implement reusable food ware at scale; Deployment of reusable food ware has been identified as a long-term goal, but there are significant barriers in the short-term including labor costs for dishwashing as well as the cost of infrastructure upgrades. Many facilities do not have adequate space to install a dishwasher or a receiving line. However, there are plans to install a dishwasher at the district's preschool. Additional challenges with reusables include limited procurement options, such as bulk milk not being available from local vendors.

Fiscal stewardship is a priority at Paso Robles Unified School District, and waste reduction initiatives should be viewed from this lens. An example of this was savings that the district realized from switching to bulk ketchup from single-use plastics which also reduced 800 pounds of ketchup packets from entering the landfill each year.

## 2. Opportunities for Collaboration and Feedback

*Guiding Questions: How can the IWMA best support TK-12 waste education? What technical assistance needs do school districts have for SB1383 compliance? Are school districts receiving support from the State? How can the IWMA and school districts better collaborate?*

Paso Robles Unified staff expressed interest in the programs offered by Science Discovery on behalf of the IWMA, especially the assembly program which focuses on food waste diversion in the cafeteria. Connecting content to career pathways was desired, and Science Discovery mentioned that they could tailor presentations to suit the district's desires. Landfill and MRF tours were highlighted as an opportunity to engage students and expose them to careers in materials management.

Jessie mentioned that she had used the IWMA's online sorting game as a resource in the Food Services newsletter that she distributes. There is an opportunity to coordinate the dissemination of other engaging content between the IWMA and school districts, as well as the opportunity for the IWMA to support waste training for custodians and nutrition staff.

Waste collection infrastructure was another area identified for potential collaboration specifically bin design selections, technology that can support the collection process, and improved signage. Signage with visuals was identified as a best practice, and Science Discovery shared examples of 3D signage that used real items found in cafeterias and could be created by students themselves to further student engagement.

School districts within San Luis Obispo County collaborate on procurement bids, so there was an expressed desire for the IWMA to provide guidance on single-use foodware selections. IWMA staff explained that foodware labeled "*compostable*" should not go in the green bin due to our local anaerobic digester's feedstock requirements, and that items such as plastic utensils are not recyclable. Other limitations include that recyclables ought to be clean and dry to go into the blue bin. Additional guidance for product selection should be coming as SB54 regulations are developed. There may also be companies

emerging to support reusable deployment, of which the school district could be an early adopter.

Another opportunity for collaboration included partnering on grants for infrastructure upgrades or education initiatives, specifically funding that emerges from SB54. The implementation of SB54 could also lead to more private investment in reusable foodware solutions; the school district was identified as a potential early adopter for this type of service if it were cost effective.

Finally, collaboration between the SLO IWMA and the County Office of Education was identified as an opportunity to better engage with school district leadership countywide.