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Recycling efforts gaining momentum in local schools

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Recycling is on the upswing in the Leon County School District, and schools will soon find out if their efforts are making a difference.

City and county staff will give a report Monday at Leon High School showing the amount of materials that have been recycled at each school. The meeting, which is held for recycling coordinators and principals, will also give school officials an idea of how well the district is doing.

In the past, only 4 percent of materials were being recycled in schools. Although some schools had their own regime, this school year is the first time the efforts have been made on a district-wide scope.

If the district increased its recycling efforts by 20 percent, there's a potential to save at least \$72,000 per year, according to studies.

"Most schools have really wrapped their arms around this, and it's a good thing to watch," said Anja DeLoach, recycling and special-services coordinator for the city.

Since August, she said more than 190,460 pounds of paper and 10,460 pounds of cans and bottles have been recycled. She said recycling in schools in the city has increased by 91 percent.

The county's 2006 figures were not available, DeLoach said, so officials won't be able to determine how much of an increase there's been in schools in unincorporated Leon County.

Members of Greenovation, a volunteer-based group whose goal is to make the community and region a green-technology capital, have been working with the school district to help improve its efforts.

Bill Berlow, an associate editor at the *Tallahassee Democrat* and chairman of Greenovation, said the short-term goal was to get a recycling coordinator at each school and to determine which schools had the equipment needed to recycle.

The long-term goal is to incorporate the importance of recycling into the curriculum in all subjects.

"Have we gotten to where we need to be, no. But I feel real good about the support that we have received from the district," said Berlow, who said he's pleased by the rapid progress.

Beth Petty, recycling coordinator at Springwood Elementary School, said students on the school's "Green Team" have become "quite the experts." It used to take them 40 minutes to collect and sort materials, but now they do it in half the time.

Rosanne Wood, principal at SAIL High School, said some of her students plan on making an educational video for elementary-school students. They're going to a local landfill to see what residents throw away.

Some schools have been lacking recycling bins, and that affects how much they can do, said Merry Ortega, executive director of secondary schools. The city, county and school district are teaming up for the state grant, Innovative Recycling/Waste Reduction Grant, which provides money to local governments to improve their recycling efforts.

Officials won't find out if they've been awarded the grant until March.