



Home ReSource
A COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY CENTER

ZERO WASTE AMBASSADORS PROGRAM

2025 - 2026 ANNUAL REPORT

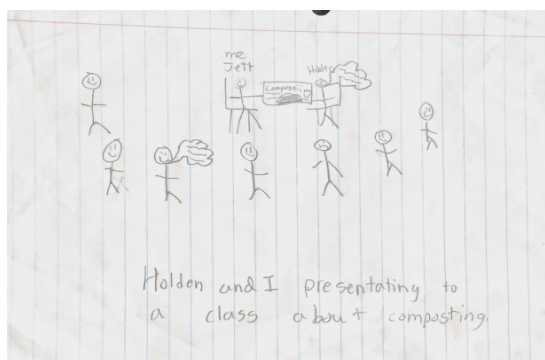
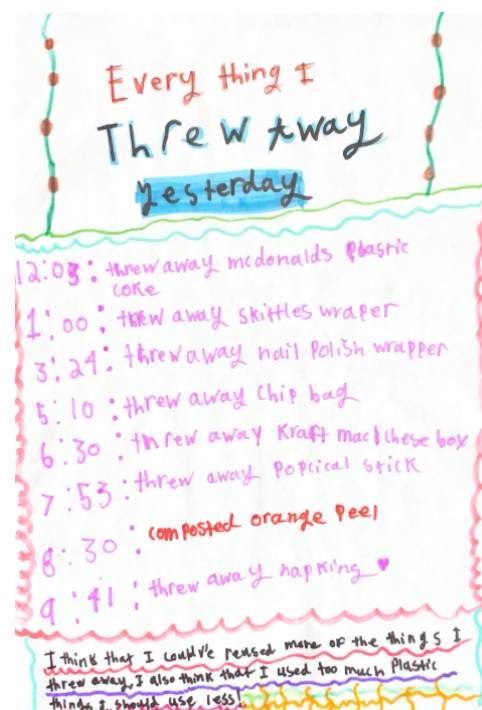
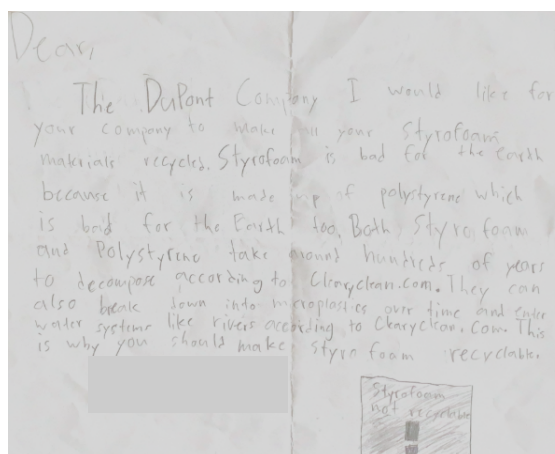
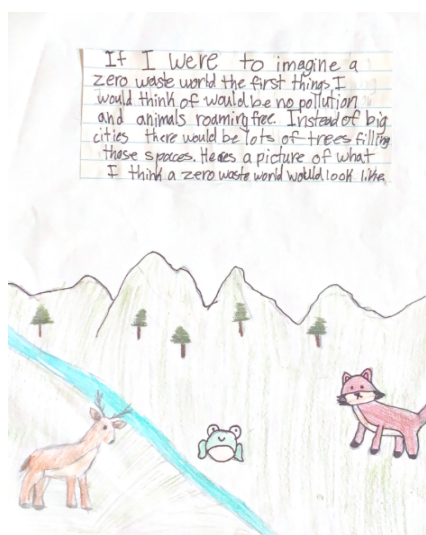


ABOUT

Home ReSource's Zero Waste Ambassadors Program, or ZWAP! for short, is a free, standards-aligned and inquiry-based program offered to all 5th grade classrooms in the Missoula area. ZWAP! dives into the complexities of zero waste, the materials economy, and the circular economy all while **uplifting student's voices and actions to create a vibrant, sustainable future.**

Students begin their ZWAP! journey with a classroom lesson to learn about the systems that make, move, and dispose of our stuff. Then, they individually create a vision for what a zero waste world could look like by reflecting on the choices and actions they already do at home or at school. Finally, students take a field trip to Home ReSource to see community reuse in action and come up with ways they can continue being ambassadors for zero waste!

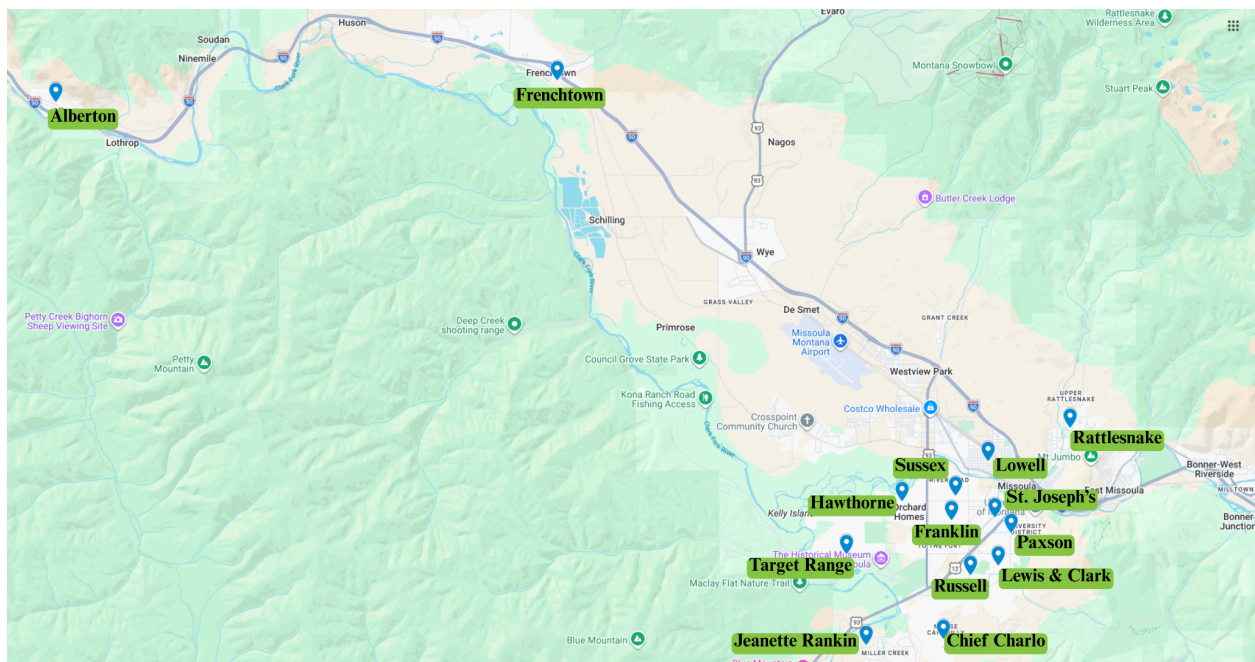
Below are some students' visions depicting their ideas for a zero waste world from left to right: A zero waste future, a letter requesting a company to change, data collection on what and when a student threw away, a self portrait of students teaching another class about composting as zero waste ambassadors, and a birdhouse made out of extra building materials.



PROGRAM REACH

347 CLASSROOMS 7,600+ ZWAP! AMBASSADORS SINCE 2015

We are continuously trying to find ways to update our curriculum to best serve the students in our program, part of that process is incorporating place-based learning. We wanted to show students the direct impacts their actions have on **THEIR** communities. This means discussing the impacts of our trash in Montana, seeing photo and video footage of the landfill that all the trash goes to from every community we serve, and finding specific actions that they can take where they live. This approach is so crucial as we continue to expand our reach to more communities in the Missoula area. Here are all of the schools that participated in ZWAP! For the 2025/2026 school year.



836 STUDENTS @ 34 CLASSROOMS @ 14 SCHOOLS

The numbers show our direct impacts. Not only do we reach nearly all 5th grade students in the Missoula area, but we also improve the students' recognition and understanding of key terms related to zero waste and sustainability. We ask students at the beginning of the classroom visit, and once more at the end of the field trip to gauge retention of these concepts.

We ask students if they have heard of the 'Circular Economy', and by the end of ZWAP! we see an average increase per classroom of over 230% in recognition of this term. The impact of this question and the importance of this statistic cannot be understated; the overall concept of the Circular Economy comprises almost every aspect of Zero Waste. Ensuring students understand the usefulness and weight of their individual choices in large systems, such as the economy, is paramount. Our impact is evident as we explain tangible actions such as reuse or recycling, things these students can actually implement in their daily lives, in order to directly transform our economy into something more sustainable.

We also ask the students if they have heard of 'greenhouse gases', we record an average recognition increase of 56% per classroom. Finally, we ask students if they can think of something their family can do to be more environmentally friendly, and we observe an average increase of nearly 40%. So, we can deduce that on average we see a 110% increase per classroom on students understanding of what zero waste is working towards (a Circular Economy), why we're working towards this (greenhouse gas emissions), and how they can have a positive impact on these systems (thinking of something they can do to be more environmentally friendly).

With this data, we can clearly see that ZWAP! is making an impactful contribution in the environmental education of youth in the Missoula area. There are over 7,600 students that have participated in this program, and these Zero Waste Ambassadors are equipped with a better understanding of zero waste practices, their impact, and the resources to help their family or neighbors contribute to sustainable systems, too. The point of ZWAP! is to uplift young voices, give them the knowledge and confidence to lead by example while encouraging others to do the same.

IMPORTANCE

"I love the opportunity to teach my students about how much of a difference they can make, even as a fifth grader. Through fun activities that connect them with their peers, the Home Resource store, and even the public, they are able to learn how important reducing waste is for our world."

The power of ZWAP! is in the students. One student from Rattlesnake reused a plastic lunch bag every day, for a couple of months, after our classroom visit. Paxson students utilize what they learned about recycling in their classrooms and lunchroom! They will continue to try their best to practice zero waste actions and teach the people around them about the importance of upholding knowing where our stuff comes from and where it goes when we reuse, recycle, and even landfill! Check out what some ZWAP! teachers have to say about the significance of this program in their classes.

Alberton fifth graders are not just zero waste ambassadors for their school, they are ambassadors for their entire community. Check out how Katie Cannon, the fifth grade teacher at Alberton, uses ZWAP! as an introduction for a year of zero waste education!

The City of Missoula has a plan to become a Zero Waste City by 2050. This means that our community is aiming to divert 90% of material from the landfill, instead finding reduction, recycled, or reused options. One of the pathways outlined in the city's plan is through education. ZWAP! is the Missoula-specific program that upholds this goal of the community!

"I love that the kids commit to being Zero Waste ambassadors for their communities. This launches our year long project on physical sciences including chemistry, astro-physics, and bike mechanics. We take our Zero Waste job seriously and each fifth grader in Alberton builds a bike for the community at Free Cycles, keeping those materials out of the landfill, working on repairs, and having fun (human-powered transportation too!)."

LONGEVITY AND EXPANSION

Throughout the 25/26 school year, our zero waste education did not stop with 5th grade. Home ReSource worked with Missoula Parks & Recreation to provide hands-on, educational programming for CS Porter Middle School students. These students participated in scavenger hunts, creating nail art, constructing reuse wind chimes, and painting murals on reclaimed materials!

We also welcomed students from Missoula International School to learn about community reuse through volunteering in our ReUse Store! These middle school students worked together on many different projects throughout the school year, including store upkeep, department organization, and helping in the construction of Home ReSource's smArt Canvasses and bee boxes!



25/26 ZWAP! WRAPPED, AND LOOKING FORWARD

This year, Home ReSource has supported all elementary and middle school zero-waste stations for Missoula County Public Schools. This commitment expands the touch-points that students experience with zero waste education and practices, supporting students school-wide.

We are looking forward to many more years of providing zero-waste education to students in the Missoula area. We would like to expand our supplemental materials and lessons for fifth-grade classrooms and beyond. ZWAP! Home ReSource is committed to helping all students continue learning, teaching, and growing to uphold zero waste in their communities today and in the future.

We couldn't do this vital work without the generous support of the Dennis & Phyllis Washington Foundation and the City of Missoula.