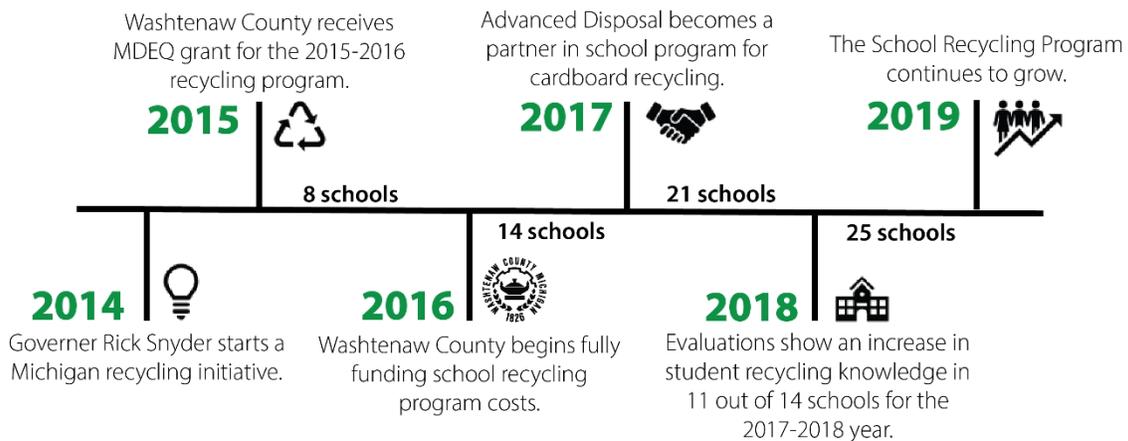


Washtenaw County School Recycling Program

Question: What is a good age to learn about recycling?

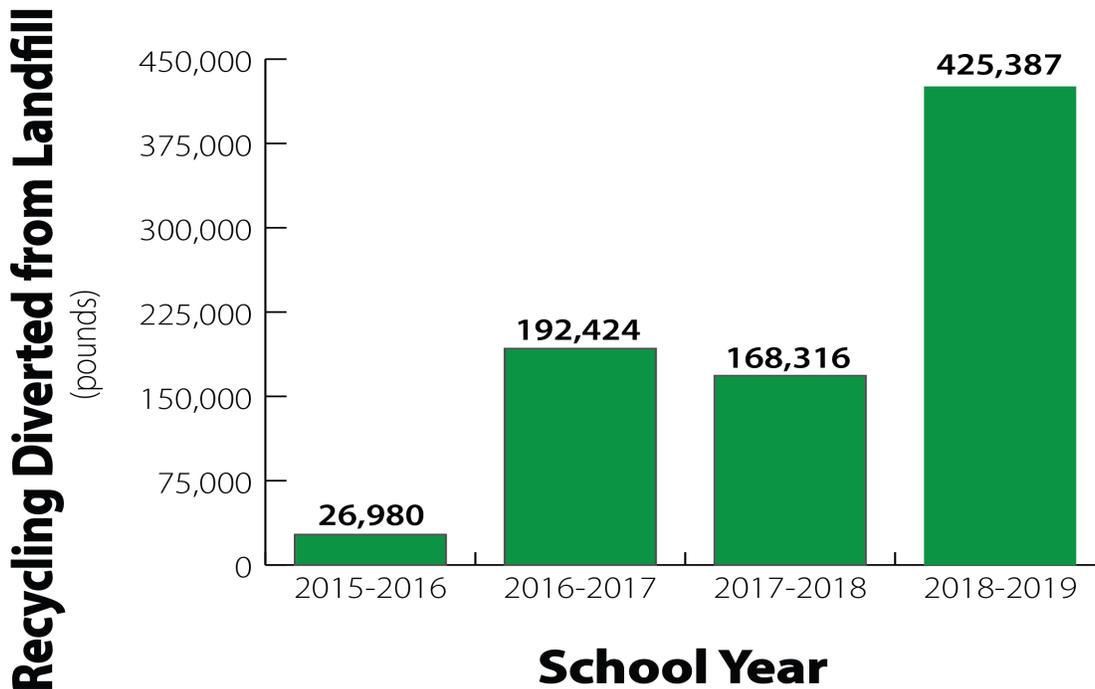
Answer: Any age!

Washtenaw County's School Recycling Program provides funding, support, and coordination to K-12 schools by incorporating recycling into their school's culture and curriculum. Currently, Washtenaw County's Solid Waste Division is working with Recycle Ann Arbor, Advanced Disposal, and the Ecology Center to educate students in 25 schools about diverting waste from landfills and participating in recycling. The program started in the 2015-2016 school year with grant money approved by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), following a pollution prevention grant initiative by Governor Rick Snyder in 2014. The initiative aligns with the goals of [Washtenaw County's 2017 Solid Waste Plan \(SWP\)](#). The School Recycling Program aligns with the third goal of the SWP that is to "develop, support, and monitor comprehensive education, outreach, and feedback programs..."



Washtenaw County both funds and coordinates recycling efforts for all schools enrolled in the School Recycling Program. The County collaborates with Recycle Ann Arbor (RAA), the Ecology Center (EC), and Advanced Disposal (AD) to make the success of the School Recycling Program possible. RAA is a nonprofit organization focused on landfill diversion. RAA hauls the schools' comingled recycling bins that exclude cardboard. Along with Washtenaw County staff, they monitor each school monthly to thoroughly audit the contents of the bins, giving the EC snapshots of what and how much is being recycled. The EC, another nonprofit in Ann Arbor, works for a sustainable future, providing education to the public about sustainable practices.

The EC provides onsite education for both staff and students throughout the 25 participating schools on best recycling practices. Using the snapshot from RAA, the EC can then design site specific programs to further each school's recycling goals. Finally, AD is a solid waste company that hauls the bulky cardboard from the schools for recycling. In the past, AD has sponsored recycling contests for the participating schools, including [poster](#) and art contests, with winners being featured on an electronic billboard and receiving prizes appropriate for their grade.



Each year, as the program grows, so does the amount of waste diverted from the landfill. To manage the growth of the program Washtenaw County requires each partner to collect metrics relevant to their involvement for possible improvements to be made to the program. For example, the EC utilizes surveys to monitor areas where they can improve their educational efforts. In the 2017-2018 school year, surveys about what recyclable items were recyclable at school were given to students in 14 of 21 schools in the beginning and end of the year. In 11 of the 14 schools, students' recycling knowledge improved by 65%. The knowledge gain has been seen in the increased recycling rates and decreased trash expenditures. When the program began in the 2015-2016 school year, about 13.5 tons of recycling was diverted from the landfill. By the 2018-2019 school year, that number grew to around 213 tons.

Three things that keep this program running and expanding are communication, education, and teamwork. Communication starts with an individual or team within a school with the desire for recycling. That desire becomes a need for education when practices are implemented to ensure that recycling is done properly. The practices are then maintained with continuous education and teamwork between RAA, the EC, AD, Washtenaw County, and those within the schools, especially the students. The students can carry their knowledge of recycling home and throughout life. With this knowledge, they can begin the communication process

again and continue to help diverting waste from landfills, helping themselves and future generations reserve the world's limited landfill space and resources.

For the DEQ Community Pollution Prevention Grant Final Report, see [Washtenaw County School Recycling and Education Program Final Project Report](#) (2015-2017).