

# Medford schools launch textile recycling program



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Through a new recycling program with Bay State Textiles, Medford's schools are collecting old clothes and fabrics to cut down on textile waste. For every ton of textiles collected, Bay State pays \$100 to the schools' PTOs. Wicked Local Photo/Alex Ruppenthal

By Alex Ruppenthal aruppenthal@wickedlocal.com Posted Oct. 30, 2014 @ 9:30 am

### MEDFORD

A new recycling program in Medford Public Schools is encouraging families not to throw out their ripped jeans, hole-filled socks and other used clothes and fabrics — which don't get recycled as much as items like paper, cans and bottles.

This September, the district installed bins outside schools to collect used textiles, which

are picked up and either reused or repurposed by Bay State Textiles.

For every ton of textiles collected, the company pays \$100 to the schools' PTOs, which use the money to enhance student activities and programs.

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What can be recycled?

"The holes in your socks, the ripped jeans, they're all too good for the trash," said Kathryn Larsen, the company's recycling development coordinator. "Bay State Textiles takes it all — the good, the bad, the ugly: clothes, shoes, household linens, stuffed animals. Basically, if you can wear it, we'll take it. Hats, belts, suspenders — as long as it's not wet or contaminated with hazardous material."

According to a study by the state's Department of Environmental Protection, Massachusetts discards 520 million pounds of textile waste each year — 95 percent of which can be recycled.

In 2012, Bay State Textiles launched its first partnerships with school districts in Weymouth and Quincy. Now, the company has programs with 35 districts in Eastern Massachusetts.

"I like to call it a feel-good program," said Larsen, adding U.S. citizens discard an average of 70 pounds of textiles per year. "It feels good to clean out. It feels good to support the local community and it feels good to help the environment."

The company has bins stationed outside all of the district's schools, excluding Roberts Elementary School, which chose not to participate because of concerns that the bins would bring unwanted people onto school grounds.

As of mid-October, the Brooks Elementary School had already collected 1,000 pounds of textiles, earning \$50 for the school's PTO.

"It's going great," said Principal Kevin Andrews said. "We got one bin, we filled it up pretty quickly and when they came to pick it up again, it was full. So they've actually added a second bin already."

Andrews said the bin hasn't caused any issues outside the school.

"It hasn't been a problem at all," he said. "I was concerned people might leave some stuff around it, but it's been nice and clean and organized."

Medford Energy and Environment Director Alicia Hunt said the Andrews Middle School and Columbus Elementary School are also off to quick starts, having collected about 500 pounds of textiles in the program's first few weeks.

Hunt said prior to the program, there was no organized effort in the city to recycle textiles.

"It was definitely a need in the community," Hunt said. "It is [also] a savings to the city of Medford because anything that people put in their trash, the city has to pay Waste Management to take it away. We pay for trash removal by the pound."

So what happens to the fabrics?

Once a week, Bay State sends a driver to collect and weigh the recycled textiles before delivering them to a warehouse.

If fabrics are in good condition, Bay State resells them so they can be used to make clothes, shoes, household linens and other items.

Larsen said 44 percent of collected textiles are reused this way, helping to create tailoring and other jobs around the world.

"There's a healthy demand in the used clothing industry globally," Larsen said.

Fabrics in poor condition are usually broken down and reused as wiping rags, installation, in stuffed animals and even in vehicles — Larsen said cars have an average of about 50 pounds of recycled textiles.

In addition to supplying materials needed across the globe, the new recycling stream also gives schools a chance to teach students what they can reuse instead of throwing away.

"We can talk about recycling and the fact that their clothes can be made into something else," Andrews said. "They can understand that we're not wasting, we're not throwing things in the trash. There's definitely an educational aspect to it."

Hunt said her family has several bags filled with ripped jeans and cloth bags, old socks and other used fabrics, which she plans to send to one of the bins.

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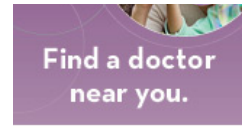
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