

I spend the end of one lunch per week standing at a compost bin, pinching other people's trash between my tongs, and carefully pulling dripping bits of plastic from one wreaking bin to the other. Why? Quite simply, nobody else is going to do it.

Everyone at Olympia High School composts. Everyone at Olympia High School recycles. That's what I thought, anyway. After all, a militant approach to environmentalism is the primary attitude I've experienced here in the last four years. If trash, recycling, and compost aren't all sorted properly, a sin akin to blasphemy has been committed. However, even in this hyper-environmentalist environment, it is not even close to true that everyone here composts. Despite all the social norms in place, it still takes a couple of students standing at the compost bins and threatening their peers with tongs, just to keep the compost free from contamination. It still takes a whole club to run the recycling program and deliver the school's recycling to the dumpster where the city can pick it up. Occasionally, it still takes an investigation into the custodial staff to make sure they're actually doing their part to deliver the compost bags to the compost dumpster.

This was the second time in the last year that our carefully sorted compost had not been delivered to its appropriate dumpster. The first time, the head custodian openly admitted that she hadn't been delivering our compost. It had been easier to just toss the whole bag into the trash. However, this was part of her job, and she was corrected. Now, almost a year later, the city emailed us to tell us that, on a regular basis, we had far less compost than any other school, despite our larger size. This just didn't make sense. Environmental club volunteers sort about one full bin of compost per day at lunch, so the pick-up dumpster should be quite full each week. When questioned, the head custodian claimed to always convey our sorted

compost from the lunchroom to the pick-up dumpster, but it just didn't match up with the city records of our usual compost amounts. Somehow or other, our compost was not making it to the city's pick-up.

Really, though, it doesn't matter whether the custodians are lying or there was a mix-up with the bins or the city was confused somehow. It doesn't matter because the end result is the same: some high school kids that just want to make a difference, no matter how small, wasted their free time at lunch. We wanted to do something good, and we failed. That's how any movement works, though. We want to get something done, so we try to do it. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. In this case, hopefully, at least some of our compost will actually make it into the city bin, now, since we'll be checking up on it a bit more carefully. Beyond this, though, there is an impact because volunteers "wasted" their time. Did we waste it? Yes, in that the compost we sorted was put in the trash. Also no, though, in that the entire student body saw that we cared enough about our cause to give up our lunches in order to pick through their garbage. Also no, in that we have brought attention to the inadequate system our school district has set up for waste disposal. Also no, in that in any movement, some people must have a hard time making it work, and we took on that role.

After all, nobody else was going to take it. Being part of a real change isn't as romantic as history teachers like to make it sound. Implementing a real change involves lowering oneself to the lowest tasks: things like looking through other people's trash. It's literally stinky, slimy, and sticky. Things don't go exactly as planned, and sometimes they don't seem to work at all, but that's ok, because the point isn't always what actually gets done. The point is that it's going to get done eventually.