Trays on Campus and Solving this Problem

By: Logan Shirley

Littering is a major issue and is often overlooked. If someone takes a stroll through any urban area, or even rural, they can find large amounts of trash. One of the most important areas to protect are oceans as a change in them affects the world as a whole, and 60% of oceanic pollution can be attributed to litter ("*How Does"*). With litter being the most evident form of environmental pollution, it seems everyone is fine with it. This same erroneous thought process is also evident at Belleville East. The best solution to the problem of trays on campus would be to make outdoor places to put trays or to change to a biodegradable alternative.

All around the campus, there is a growing number of trays left outside from students who did not take them back to the cafeteria. To start with, leaving trash all around campus is bad for the environment. Plastic items that are able to float can cause harm to water systems. With both a pond and creak on campus, they are always in danger of pollution. Trash left unattended outside can easily blow away and end up in our water systems. In addition, the trays could give the school a bad reputation. Often, groups come to campus for anything from recruiting, graduation and speaking. Whenever people come to campus, what they see can leave a big impact on whether they come back or not. Most likely, they do not like it and are repulsed. Moreover, the general uncleanliness of the trays do not create a good environment for students to learn in. Most people, to begin with, do not want to go to school. This can be worsened when parts of the school begin to resemble a dump rather than our campus. It can be hard to concentrate during class when students do not even want to go outside due to the mess. The mess of trays around campus causes various problems and needs to be addressed swiftly.

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In the past, we have used alternatives to trays, and these have worked very well. The only problem can be that some alternatives are not biodegradable, so they would cause more problems than they solve. Using a biodegradable material would be good for the environment and campus. Doing this would reduce the amount of trash produced, as it could be recycled or composted. It would also remove any problem of trash being left out as it could all be disposed of after use. Shawn Hennon, a current teacher, has said that in the past using alternatives to the current trays has eliminated the issue. It would save on cleaning costs. Assuming an average pay of minimum wage, 10 dishwashers, and 180 days worked, the school would spend about $163,800 in wages. If you instead used paper trays for all of the about 3,000 students that would cost around $86,400. A disposable alternative would not cost a lot more, or even save money. You can easily find paper bags in bulk for $.03 and paper trays for $.16 each (*Compostable Fiber*). On the other hand, plastic trays cost around $.15 each (*Enviroware*). It would only cost a small amount more to use paper instead of the current plastic alternative. The school could easily save a significant amount of money and make the campus better as a whole by changing to a paper alternative rather than the current plastic reusable or disposable trays.

Perhaps the easier solution would be to make some kind of outside collection area. This can be done by changing the type of trash can used on campus. Outside of the cafeteria there is a single trash can with a top designed to collect trays. Elvie Ganer, janitor, has expressed that this kind of trash can is both helpful in that it is a place to put trays and that it makes collecting trays easier (Ganer). With approximately 20 outside trash cans on campus that do not have a way to

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collect trays, replacing them would not be that hard. A good alternative costing around $1,100 can be found (*Food Court*). From there you would just have to swap the old ones out for the new ones. It could also make the campus look better. The ones we currently have are a mix of 2 different designs. Both of these are ineffective at gathering trays. Standardizing them would make campus more cohesive and more attractive. Fixing the problem of scattered trays can be just as easy as changing the trash cans on campus.

Using a biodegradable alternative to disposable trays or making a good outdoor place to put trays are just two of the possible solutions to the problem of trays being left outside. Bad habits like littering can begin from something as simple as leaving trays outside. Littering is a large part of pollution and can become a massive problem if left unchecked for a lifetime. Because of this, the problem must be addressed now. With some simple solutions, this problem can quickly be fixed. While cliche, when it comes to littering it's important to, "be part of the solution, not the pollution."

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