

# A Review of the Garden to Cafeteria Pilot Program

Fall 2015

Moriah Maternoski, Farm to School Intern

During the 2015-2016 School Year, 4 schools participated in a Garden to Cafeteria Pilot Program, featuring their school garden produce in MPS school meals: Howe Elementary School, Anthony Middle School, Anwatin Middle School and Roosevelt High School. The following describes the logistical processes involved in connecting the lunchroom and garden, the challenges encountered, the highlights and recommendations for the continuation and expansion of the Garden to Cafeteria program.

A special thank you to the garden managers and lunchroom coordinators that took the time to meet with me over the course of this review:

Kirsten Saylor and Barbara Donoho from Howe Elementary School

Daniel Magnuson and Susan Smith from Anthony Middle School

Joshua Angel, James White and Christine Evitch from Anwatin Middle School

Rhi Dalrymple (SPARK-Y Program Director) from Roosevelt High School

Annalisa Hultberg, assisted with the Food Safety aspect of the gardens

## Review of the Garden to Cafeteria Pilot Program Fall 2015

**[Howe]** Participants: Kirsten (Howe's parent coordinator), Barb (lunchroom coordinator), Howe elementary school students.

**Process:** Kirsten harvested with the students during their lunch and recess once a week and maintained the garden with students on another day. She recruited students through announcements at the end of their lunch period and usually took 5 students at a time in order to ensure proper harvesting techniques and food safety practices. Harvested produce was cleaned before being hauled into the lunch room. Barb created signage to differentiate garden produce from other produce on the salad bar. Barb and Kirsten met on a regular basis to discuss garden progress, which was integral to a successful pilot at Howe.



**Challenges:** Howe faced a number of small, but manageable, roadblocks in their garden. Prior to the season, they did not have the necessary hand washing stations for the garden outside, extra tools and a toolshed for equipment storage and appropriately sized harvest bins to use with their scale.

**Highlights:** 1) When students first got out to the garden, Kirsten walked through 5 clear steps to harvesting the day's produce. 2) Kirsten created a system that incentivized students who repeatedly helped with the garden and called them "Garden Champions". 3) Barb created signs that were placed on the clear plastic above the produce in the salad bar to advertise which items were from the garden. 4) Howe partnered with Fireroast Café to give away produce (like potatoes) that could not be used. 5) The team applied for a grant from Lowe's and Whole Foods to cover infrastructure costs for making the garden more accessible to mobile-challenged students, and to pay for tool storage and a season extension system.



In the end, "Howe's garden to cafeteria site elevated the garden to have legitimacy and support from principals and other teachers" (Kirsten Saylor)

**[Anthony]** Participants: Dan (teacher at Anthony), Sue (lunchroom manager), 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade special education science class.

**Process:** Dan took out two kids from his science class at a time to harvest and do garden maintenance on Thursdays. On Friday morning, Sue was able to get an idea of which produce she would have to



## Review of the Garden to Cafeteria Pilot Program Fall 2015

work with and what she would not have to order. Sue went several weeks without ordering tomatoes and was able to add fresh additions to the salad bar. Outside of the salad bar, she used the garden's abundance of onions for recipes on the menu and supplemented their acorn and butternut squash for sweet potatoes in the roasted sweet potato and beet dish on the menu. Sue washed, weighed and separated the produce and Dan's class did minimal washing out in the garden prior to this point.

Dan would encourage *everyone* to get involved in their school garden: "I'm learning as I go. I'm not a "master gardener and I came in knowing little. I just like to be outside".

**Challenges:** Anthony's biggest challenges were in the lunchroom. For example, they ended up planting and harvesting too much kale and eggplant, which students did not prefer due to the bitter taste. Sue was also concerned that the USDA guidelines would restrict what the produce could be used for; she wanted to make kale chips, however, she wasn't sure this would be acceptable. Additionally, they harvested tomatoes that were not ripe and were unsure if they could let them sit out to ripen.



**Highlights:** 1) Every plant in the garden was germinated by students during their school wide germinating activity in advisory time, which helped to involve students who were not in Dan's science class. 2) Anthony teamed up with Pizzeria Lola in a school-restaurant partnership. Pizzeria Lola provided funding for the creation of Anthony's pizza garden, helped with watering, received some produce when students were gone or when there was too much kale, and (most importantly) helped to create a stronger community around the garden. 3) Dan's science class had flexible curriculum and a lot of support staff, so they were able to keep up with the garden easily and teach special education students important skills.

**[Anwatin]** Participants: Christine (lunchroom coordinator), various lunchroom staff, Josh (the IT technician at Anwatin) and Mr. White (science teacher)

**Process:** At Anwatin, the lunchroom staff was in charge of harvesting the produce since the school had a hard time starting up an after school program. Staff harvested great quantities of tomatoes, cucumbers, broccoli and peppers, as well as kale to add to their tossed salad mixture in the salad bar (without the students even noticing!).

**Challenges:** Anwatin's biggest challenge was establishing a connection between the lunchroom and staff coordinating the garden. Christine described how there wasn't always a dependable go-to person the whole time, which made it difficult to know what could be used in the lunchroom. There wasn't a consistent weekly harvest day, so it became hard to avoid



## Review of the Garden to Cafeteria Pilot Program Fall 2015

missing produce that went bad. Additionally, Christine said that there was never enough produce to make a difference on a consistent basis. This is likely due in part to their school garden also doubling as a community garden. Because the after-school program was never launched, lunchroom staff was forced to do the majority of the garden work and students were not as involved in the process as they would have liked them to be. According to Christine, however, this did benefit the lunchroom coordinators: “Garden to cafeteria programs are just another way for me to communicate where student’s food comes from and what healthy food is. I want to be connected and invested in the program so I know what to say to the students”

**Highlights:** 1) Christine made tomato soup and Pico de Gallo, and froze tomatoes that split due to weather. 2) Prior to this garden, most students didn’t know what real fruits and vegetables are (they thought that orange juice was a fruit), so at Anwatan the garden produce in the salad bar opened up discussion on what fruits and vegetables are. 3) Since harvesting was primarily done by lunchroom staff, they were able to be more connected and invested in the program.



**[Roosevelt]** Participants: SPARK-Y lead Rhi, Roosevelt teachers (watering), RUF Squad, Roosevelt shop class and Todd (lunchroom coordinator)

**Process:** Roosevelt partnered with an outside organization, SPARK-Y, to teach students how to grow greens and herbs from their aquaponics system and student-built greenhouse. They had an after school program called the RUF (Roosevelt Urban Farm) Squad that met every Thursday for 2 hours to build the greenhouse and other tools, learn

about their aquaponics system and harvest produce. Lunchroom staff left their fridge unlocked so that the RUF Squad could clean up the greens with a designated wash station in the kitchen, weigh/record their total amount and get them ready for serving the following day. Roosevelt looks forward to having an aquaponics and greenhouse course next semester as an elective.

**Challenges:** SPARK-Y’s program lead, Rhi, described her biggest challenge in figuring out the food safety aspect of the garden. Since the greens and herbs were going to be used in school lunches, they required special attention; they were growing kale on mini hills next to the greenhouse outside, however, they were concerned about possible contamination because the produce was positioned so close to the sidewalk where people walk. Prior to this year, SPARK-Y had no experience writing food safety plans. When harvesting time came around, Rhi and the team found it difficult to weigh their greens because bin sizes were too big for the scales. This is something they are still working to overcome.



**Highlights:** 1) The RUF Squad gave Roosevelt's garden a place in the school and established a specific way for students to be involved. Rhi mentioned that "The kids love the after school program. The two-three students that come back consistently are really excited and students that come once are still engaged. It's a different and really important kind of learning" 2) Students used the space from Roosevelt's shop class and partnered with them to build gadgets for the aquaponics and greenhouse spaces. 3) Students were exposed to 14.3 pounds of purple kale, radish, arugula, butter lettuce, thai basil, cress microgreens, mustard greens and kohlrabi in the salad bar after their first harvest! Between 3 and 4 pounds were harvested the following week as well – 4 lbs of which was arugula.

## **[Next steps]**

1. Design food safety related infographics and techniques for before, during and after harvests.
2. Garden Coordinators would like to have "how to harvest" sheets for vegetables grown at their school (though I am not sure how this could necessarily be a standardized resource we provide for them because gardens vary so much).
3. Create a document that describes the best ways (or creative ways) to use produce grown in the gardens within USDA guidelines. Some lunchroom coordinators are not familiar with unusual veggies grown and what to do when there is an abundance of certain veggies.
4. Leverage support for gardens to be connected to special education classes or family planning classes.
5. Help gardens to solve the scale and harvest bin dilemma. The large, gray harvest bins are too large for the scales and this makes weighing a more timely and difficult task to complete.