

## Dixon's Innovative Garden: Fun with Fundraising!



When Wendy Penney and Molly Kaminsky began fundraising to build a garden at Dixon Elementary School, the outpouring of support they received exceeded their highest hopes. In fact, the newly envisioned Dixon's Innovative Garden, or DIG, garnered so much support from the community in its first year, that it didn't even need most of its PTO-designated funds to get growing.

"There's been an amazing level of involvement from the beginning," Penney, a parent volunteer at the school, said. "We involve students at every grade level, and over the summer, we recruit volunteer families for one week of garden care each. Our first summer, we had more volunteers than we had weeks!" In the fall of its first growing season, Dixon's PTO sponsored a Take Your Parents to Lunch Day event that served garden-grown, Kindergarten-harvested carrots and potatoes, roasted with fresh picked rosemary and thyme. (With refrigerator pickles on the side!) The district's Head of Nutrition attended the cost-free event as a special guest cook, helping serve the garden goodies to over 150 parents and their students.



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In the fall, DIG sees Kindergarteners exploring for worms in the spaces around carrots and potatoes (before they end up on lunch trays!), Boy and Girl Scouts picking slimy slugs off leaves and spreading mulch during Earth Week, and garden herbs such as oregano and basil on their way to the district's Nutrition Department – which returns the produce in dishes such as homemade chili for the school lunch program. Fifth graders participate in a farm-to-table nutrition workshop, where Penney teaches how to make healthy snacks with cucumbers, tomatoes, and other garden veggies. During the garden's first year, parent volunteers helped install raised garden beds, and the fifth grade P.E. class got involved mixing and hauling soil. "It really gives them a sense of pride and ownership over the garden," Penney said. "They will come back and say 'oh, that's the bed I did!'"

But before students and parents could be found DIG-ing out in the raised beds that are now carved into a gentle slope near the school, garden fundraising was in the works. At the school's April Art Gallery Night, Penney set up a garden table where visitors could "sponsor a bed," by making donations of different amounts. Sponsors received garden t-shirts, and for the largest donations, a metal plaque on one of the garden beds.

Dixon also partnered with a neighboring restaurant called Parkside 23, which has its own garden just behind the school. The restaurant fundraiser allowed DIG volunteers to hand out fliers to Dixon families and staff about the school's garden project; if diners submitted their flier at the end of their meal, Parkside donated 25% of their bill to DIG. "We really aligned in our values of serving real, fresh, healthy food, so this was a perfect match," Penney said.

Dixon sought sponsorship from other local businesses as well, many of which made donations in the form of gift cards or profit sharing. In the spring, Dixon even organized it's own farmer's market, where Dixon families and students sold

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## Raising Support for DIG

Finances	
PTO	\$1000 – for Eagle Scout fence project. PTO also had designated funds for building the garden, but other fundraising efforts were so successful, that instead, they designated \$1000 per year for refreshing and revitalizing every future year. This funding will allow DIG to spend time and energy on the garden instead of the fundraising aspect.
Sponsor-a-Bed	\$1,685 – from community donations. Different donation levels allowed participants to get a garden t-shirt and/or garden bed plaque.
Dixon Spring Farmer's Market	\$800 – from sales of seedlings planted by Dixon's Boy Scouts, bulbs, baked goods, and home-made maple syrup and canned goods donated by Dixon students and families.
Parkside 23 Restaurant	\$310 – from patrons who chose to designate 25% of their bill to help the garden on a specific date.
Great Harvest Bread Co.	\$60 – 20% of its farmer's market sales on a specific date
First Grade Girl Scouts	\$115 – donated from their bake sale
Stein's	\$100 – gift card for supplies
Home Depot	\$50 – gift card for supplies, plus labor cutting wood
Lowes	Fencing materials for Eagle Scout project sold at cost.
Relationships	
Dixon Students	105 Garden Club students, countless Boy and Girl Scouts, and gardening classrooms
Dixon Parents	60 families helped directly with the garden as volunteers
Dixon Staff	"Support with all things gardening"
Amy Jacobson	Art teacher – designed t-shirts for garden fundraising. Driving force behind future Dixon outdoor classroom.
Molly Kaminsky	First grade teacher – responsible for garden curricular connections, assisted with garden planning and fundraising, led compost education with nutrition department, assisted in outdoor classroom planning
Dr. Siegenthaller	Dixon's principal – offered advice for doing things "right" within school boundaries
Wendy Penney	Lead fundraiser, Garden Club coordinator, and DIG garden champion!
Elmbrook Schools Department of Food and Nutrition Services	Donated a composter, helped with composting program, excited to use garden produce in food service
Eric Schuh	Eagle Scout – designed and built 75'x13' garden fence, after obtaining a permit from City of Brookfield to build.

seedlings, baked goods, and handcrafts, with proceeds directly benefiting DIG.

In its first year of fundraising, the DIG project raised an incredible \$3,100. The school's PTO gave an additional \$1,000 to support an Eagle Scout Eric Schuh in building a wooden fence around the garden. The PTO had also designated funds to support the garden directly, but because of the success of the fundraising, this money was saved for future years, giving DIG a generous yearly operating budget. "Because of the PTO support, we won't have to do much fundraising next year" Penney said. "We'll still set up a table at the Art Gallery Night to generate excitement and volunteers, but we won't need sponsors like we did our first year, unless families want a personalized name plaque on a raised bed, of course."

As it celebrates a year of success, DIG is excited to take on new projects to benefit its students, such as an expanded outdoor classroom space next to the garden. They are also excited to pay it forward to others interested in school gardens. This season, a neighboring school will use Dixon's greenhouse space alongside the school's Garden Club – a recess program Penney began four years before DIG came to life, using up-cycled milk cartons for students to plant their own seedlings. Penney is also ready and willing to share spreadsheets about fundraising and garden planning with anyone who asks. "This is such an incredible project – I think it's going to take off like wildfire," she said.

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