

# Lincoln Inquiry Charter School



Each afternoon, Liesl Schultz Hying makes her way out to a sunny spot near the playground at Lincoln Inquiry Charter School (LINCS), where the LINCS garden smiles in all shades of green. Recess is in full swing, and a flock of students gather around her, asking to help. She hands out watering cans and buckets, until only one student, a kindergarten boy, remains at her feet. "Miss Liesl, I need to show you something!" He takes her over to the lettuce patch, where seedlings have recently emerged from the soil. He points at one. "That one," he says, "I planted that one, right there."

This spring, each of the 385 students at LINCS will plant a seed or seedling in one of the school's four raised beds - and one in-ground bed - forming a connection to the food that will soon become recess and after-school garden snacks, or even dinner at home.

The LINCS garden was a new addition to the Whitewater, WI schoolyard last spring, and has quickly become a draw for students and families. Students visit the garden freely during recess, as well as during scheduled planting and garden care days with their classes.



The garden is primarily home to crops that students can pick and eat on the spot - beans, tomatoes, chives, kale, lettuce, radishes, and carrots. "Carrots were the most talked-about food last year," Liesl recalls. "The students asked where they were growing, and when they could harvest and eat them. When they were finally ready, the kids were so excited to take a bite, they barely washed them off!"

Last school year, Liesl was an AmeriCorps Farm to School Service Member. This school year she is a paraprofessional at LINCS, and has the flexibility to work with about a dozen students on indoor gardening projects such as establishing plants from cuttings, starting tomato seedlings, and growing sunflower and buckwheat sprouts to eat. "I want to give students even more opportunities to get involved hands-on with the garden," she said. "My hope is that they will learn to nurture and care for plants, and that these experiences and knowledge will carry over to their every day life as they interact with their parents, their teachers, and their peers."

May 2016

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Families are involved, too. Every Monday afternoon – including the weeks of summer vacation – Liesl hosts an informal garden gathering for gardeners of all ages. Logs serve as a gathering and natural play area, and families can stay for ten minutes or two hours. Liesl leads a short garden-based activity that incorporates environmental education, science, math, or art. There is also an activity box with a variety of supplies for garden journaling and measuring, and magnifying lenses for detailed investigations of flowers, worms, or pollinators in the garden's new perennial area.

Families can sign up to care for the garden from Tuesday to Sunday, including harvesting and using ripe produce. Last summer, the garden's abundant swiss chard crop became a favorite. "It was a new food for many families at first," Liesl said, "but they were eager to try it. Three children in one family enjoyed multiple servings of the chard the first time they tried it."



Liesl has also helped connect the garden to the surrounding community. Her involvement with Working for Whitewater's Wellness (a health coalition also known as W3) has led to the organization's financial support of the garden. Donations of materials have come from local businesses, while volunteers come from UW-Whitewater, school families, and the surrounding community. Liesl has connected the school with the UW-Whitewater greenhouse, which houses the garden's tomato and pepper seedlings. Besides going into the garden, these seedlings are available for students and families to take at the PTO's annual Spring Fling fundraiser. "It's really neat to see how excited the kids are to have their own plant to grow food," she said. "One of my main missions is to help families eat healthy and learn where food comes from, and the garden is really achieving that goal."

To learn more about the LINCS garden, visit their [garden blog](#).

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