

Cathedral School Garden



Beth Piggush loves seeing kids run from the playground to the garden to grab an after school snack. “Ground cherries are a favorite,” the Cathedral Elementary volunteer garden coordinator said. “Cherry tomatoes and beans are great too. Whatever they can find and try, they’ll eat.”

While after school garden snacking is an impromptu, un-programmed activity, it couldn’t be more in keeping with the message of the garden at Cathedral, which serves students from pre-K through second grade.

The garden at Cathedral excels at showing kids, in a very hands-on way, how to make healthy food and physical activity choices that are integrated into the fabric of daily life, just like the garden has been integrated into life at school.

Cathedral’s garden – which now includes five raised beds as well as berry and pumpkin patches bordered by pollinator-friendly flowers – began as a conversation about healthier lunch options at a PTO meeting in 2012, at which Piggush and one other parent volunteered to spearhead the project. Since then, the Cathedral garden team has worked to connect the garden with core classroom curriculum, physical education, after school and summer programs, cafeteria offerings, and more.

Each spring, one hundred percent of Cathedral students are involved in planting the garden, with classes starting seeds indoors, planting directly into the garden, or both. Piggush and other garden leaders have also gathered resources for teachers to use during in-classroom lessons, such as puzzles with different plant parts, garden-related work sheets, and lessons from *Got Dirt?* and *Got Veggies?*

Cathedral’s Physical Education teacher, Jackie Czeiska, has also been highly involved in the garden. Czeiska was one of the lead teachers for Cathedral’s initial garden funding – a Team Nutrition grant – and has dedicated a full week of class

November 2015

This story was produced by the Wisconsin School Garden Initiative, a program of Community GroundWorks. For more information, visit www.wischoolgardens.org.



Cathedral School Garden



time each year to teaching about healthy eating and gardening as a healthy lifestyle choice. She has also been open to using garden work projects as part of her PE classes, and had included taste testing of garden produce – such as this year’s rhubarb sauce – in the spring field day she organizes.

Because the garden is located directly next to the playground, students also have the opportunity to get involved outside of class time. Students are free to visit the garden after school as parents arrive to pick them up – including harvesting and eating produce. Cathedral’s after school Girl Scout Troop gets involved in raising and planting transplants, and students in the school’s summer camp program help out with harvesting, watering, and beautifying the garden with outdoor art.

After students have had their fill of ground cherries and other garden snacks, there is still plenty of produce to go around. Each year, some of that produce finds its way to the school cafeteria. To help develop this part of the garden program, Piggush received a Buy Local grant from the Department of Agriculture, Tourism, and Consumer Protection. Through this grant, Cathedral was able to hire local chef Shawn McManus to train kitchen staff in fresh food preparation techniques, how to incorporate herbs and veggies from the garden, and where to source other local ingredients. “One of the favorite recipes was roasted cauliflower,” Piggush said. “It tastes like popcorn to the kids, and the kitchen staff still prepare it to this day.” Chef Shawn’s work culminated in a pizza-making demonstration where kids watched – and tasted! – the process of making pizza with garden veggies.



The garden also reaches beyond the borders of the school itself, to involve families, and even students from the nearby university. Families are involved via a PTO-organized Garden Club, which they can sign up for at the beginning of the year. Parents help out with garden maintenance after school, and everyone receives garden updates via the school’s PTO list serve and facebook page.

November 2015

This story was produced by the Wisconsin School Garden Initiative, a program of Community GroundWorks. For more information, visit www.wischoolgardens.org.



Cathedral School Garden



UW LaCrosse students have also gotten involved via a nutrition field experience class, where they earn credit for assisting with school garden lessons, as well as prepping veggies for cafeteria taste tests. “This was my first big school garden experience,” former UW student Erin Moriearty said. “We worked on everything from planting beans in the classroom to teaching about what plants need to grow, to planting in the garden itself.”

Moriearty, who has gone on to lead garden education programs with Community GroundWorks and REAP Food Group, said the two biggest strengths she saw in the garden program at Cathedral were the wide-ranging support from staff and parents, and the garden’s location near the playground.

“I think we’ve really captured students’ interest while they’re in school,” Piggush added. “And that has caught on to families talking about gardening, and in the kids bringing the idea to their next school as third graders.”

Indeed, Cathedral’s garden continues to show students that healthy eating and physical activity can be rewarding and fun – as fun, perhaps, as running over to find a ground cherry, and then returning to the monkey bars. .

November 2015

This story was produced by the Wisconsin School Garden Initiative, a program of Community GroundWorks. For more information, visit www.wischoolgardens.org.

