



Saturday, August 14, 2010

C-L-K school garden project yields rich harvest By Madeline Baron and David Clanaugh*

C-L-K teacher Debbie Pavolich and students who are in the summer Great Explorations Program water a raised-bed garden and record measurements for the gardening log. (Photo © 2010 and courtesy Debbie Pavolich)



CALUMET -- When a team of C-L-K (Calumet-Laurium-Keweenaw) Elementary School teachers inspired by colleague Melissa Schneiderhan began incorporating a gardening program into their lesson plans last spring, little did they suspect how much it would capture the students' -- and each others' -- imaginations and energy. The teachers and students started out with eight beds, but the garden will be at least twice that size for the upcoming school year.



During the last week of school in June, Melissa Schneiderhan shows her fifth graders how to plant a "pizza" garden, including onions, cucumbers, basil, cauliflower, oregano, peppers, broccoli and sunflowers. "Maybe we're going to have enough for a vegetarian pizza eventually," Schneiderhan said. (Photos by *Keweenaw Now* unless otherwise indicated)

Gardens are flourishing at both the front and the back of the school, and even in the bus drop-off area. The garden project serves as an example of how small seeds -- whether ideas or actual seeds -- can yield large harvests and build community.

An example of the community building aspect of gardening has been the involvement of the BHK Child Development Board's Great Exploration (GE) summer youth program at C-L-K with maintenance of the garden beds during the summer months. GE youth also reap benefits from the wellness and educational aspects of gardening, and can continue to do so when they participate in after-school programming once the school year begins.

The garden's purpose is to help students learn in a hands-on environment about the impacts they make on the watershed and how to reduce those impacts, explained Debbie Pavolich, a second grade teacher at C-L-K Elementary School.

"What started out as a stewardship initiative has grown into an outdoor classroom," Pavolich said.

Pavolich teaches summer school at C-L-K, so has regular opportunities to tend the garden with students. She said fifth-grade teacher Schneiderhan has been the driving force in starting the garden and fueling the growth of the project.

The first lessons taught in the garden revolve around sustainable gardening methods. The garden uses a raised-bed planting system in efforts to conserve water.



In June students take turns watering the newly planted raised beds.

Teachers are finding more and more ways to include the garden in their lesson plans. Math students can be found measuring plant growth and calculating the volume and area of the garden beds. Science classes study plant life cycles, organic farming and composting methods. The librarian reads gardening and farming books to students in the gazebo, built by the C-L-K High School wood shop class. Art students meet in the garden to practice sketching and other techniques.



An art display outside the C-L-K library creates an all-school awareness of the garden project.

Each class chooses its own garden theme. Some classes vote to plant all flowers, while for other classes everything is edible. One class chose a color theme, only planting vegetables with colorful names including purple and green beans and red radishes. Of course, no school garden project would be complete without a pizza garden, so Schneiderhan's fifth-grade class has planted the ingredients to make this perennial school lunch favorite. Stacey Lancour and her third graders planted a pasty garden -- growing onions, rutabagas, potatoes and other ingredients.

Stacey Lancour, C-L-K third-grade teacher helps her class plant vegetables for a pasty garden.

"We're hoping to get families to help make pasties," Lancour said in June, just before the end of the school year. "We hope to involve the families and give the kids the chance to eat something that they've grown."

Thanks to an early start to the growing season, students during the spring didn't let the early harvest go to waste, making veggie roll-ups with the garden project's first fruits. As students return to school this fall, they can look forward to pasties, pizza and other garden-based delights.





Kindergarten teacher Jenni Rautio shows her students how to plant onions in their "square foot" garden in early June.

The "Heritage Garden" also provides creative ways to incorporate hands-on learning into lessons beyond agriculture and cooking. For example, students will harvest ingredients in the fall to make pasties as part of a local history lesson about the region's copper mining heritage and rich mixture of immigrant groups, including pasty makers from Cornwall. More broadly, the garden will help teach children about the area's history of gardening and agriculture. The children have been making a history book of area gardening and are looking for stories about local farmers and gardeners.

Students also take what they have learned in the garden into the community, making visits to local nursing homes to share their experiences and to seek gardening tips from elders skilled in coaxing plants to grow in this northern latitude. These conversations with elders provide another facet to the history of area gardening.

Steve Rozich, C-L-K elementary assistant principal, said the Heritage Garden provides a first gardening experience for many children.

"This is a fabulous, fabulous opportunity for the children to see the life cycles of plants," Rozich noted.

During the last week of school in June, Steve Rozich, C-L-K Elementary assistant principal, makes the rounds of the garden plots, encouraging teachers and students. Also pictured here are Jenni Rautio (at left) and her kindergartners, with Michelle Nelson, paraprofessional teaching assistant (background, right).



During the summer months, GE students tend the garden and provide nurturance. They water the garden first thing in the morning so the plants get a chance to soak up moisture before the midday heat. Many of the crops peak before all the students return in the fall, so the GE students keep a log with the summer school students to document the progress the gardens have made. The GE students also enjoy the stream of fresh produce, incorporating the vegetables into their summertime activities.



One of the Great Exploration students records her garden data and interpretations to share with other GE program participants and with classmates when they return to school in the fall. (Photo © 2010 and courtesy Debbie Pavolich)

The garden provides a great experience for the students. Some of them would not have the opportunity otherwise, said Tiffany Scullion, GE coordinator at the C-L-K Elementary School. Scullion also credited Schneiderhan with helping the gardens take root at C-L-K.

"She has been keeping the rest of the group motivated, involved and wanting to expand," Scullion said. "There have been plenty of teachers involved, with Melissa providing much encouragement and inspiration."

Tracie Clanaugh, who supervises Scullion and eight other GE coordinators across the Copper Country, said the gardening project provides a great example of a site-specific partnership between the host school and BHK's youth-serving program. Clanaugh added that the garden project is a great fit with the GE program's wellness emphasis, planting the seeds for students to increase their activity levels as life-long gardeners who then can eat in a more healthy manner.



Alisha Carne, left, a recent graduate of Finlandia University's elementary education program, assisted by Michelle Sackson-Hodges, helps GE students maintain one of the flower gardens during the summer.

The strategy to promote sustainability and wellness involves starting with the youngest students. Before they were even officially enrolled at C-L-K, next fall's incoming crop of kindergartners planted sunflower seeds during spring registration with their parents. When the youngsters return in the fall as full-fledged kindergartners, towering sunflowers will greet them in their very own garden. Toasted sunflower seeds may very likely show up as a classroom project and snack during the early weeks of the new school year.

Pavolich said she had never been big into gardening until the C-L-K project, but her grandparents had served as role models with their huge beautiful garden. She now enjoys getting into the gardening through her lessons with her students -- experiences that trigger fond memories of her gardening grandparents.

Debbie Pavolich and her second graders show off the beginnings of their garden in early June.

During the summer months Pavolich continues to work on the garden with her summer school students, many of whom participate in GE. Some families in the community also have gardening space available at the school, so the project ends up involving all the generations.

Continuing the focus on sustainability, gardeners are currently awaiting the arrival of two rain barrels. The barrels will provide additional opportunities for students to learn sustainable watershed management methods by diverting run-off into the gardens. Using rainwater will reduce the need for irrigation water that requires fossil fuels to operate pumps. Rainwater can also promote better long-term soil health and plant growth than well water -- all topics for potential future lesson plans and GE activities.





The project receives funding from three sources: a Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative (LSSI) grant, the Building Healthy Communities Program run by the Western Upper Peninsula District Health Department, and the National Gardening Association's Adopt-A-School-Garden Program. The project also receives in-kind support from the C-L-K Area Schools and BHK's GE program.

Debbie Pavolich's students participated in making a plan for the garden, deciding where to plant each type of vegetable. Click on photos for larger versions. (Photos by *Keweenaw Now* unless otherwise indicated)

***Editor's Note:** Visiting reporter Madeline Baron is a student in David Clanaugh's summer journalism class at Michigan Tech University. David assisted with this article by incorporating the information about the Great Explorations program, which his wife, Tracie, supervises.

Posted by Keweenaw Now at [1:01 PM](#) 