



Growing Minds *North Little Rock, AR*

FOOD-BASED CURRICULUM

Farm to school programming exists in a wide variety of formats outside of serving locally grown food in school cafeterias. At Pike View Early Childhood Center, farm to school has taken on a life of its own as an early education teaching tool. The Childhood Center has successfully integrated food-based nutrition education with garden-based learning. According to Jody Veit-Edrington, coordinator of early childhood education for the North Little Rock School District, “the extension of learning to the garden is very motivating and the kids really get into it.”

Their nutrition programs began with Grow It, Try It, Like It, which encourages children to try six different fruits and vegetables which they



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normally do not have access to at home. In order to add to the farm to school programming, they looked to the University of Arkansas Medical School’s *Inspire Smart Eating (ISE)* nutrition education program. Teachers

have the option to participate in training so they can effectively implement the program. Consisting of three main components, *ISE* includes lesson plans for units focused on eight different fruits and vegetables, recipes, and activities that blend academic subjects such as math and reading with food experiences.

This food-based curriculum also has the added benefit of home carryover. Children are given materials, such as recipes and a note from the farmer who grew their food, which they bring home and share with their guardian to encourage continuation of healthy eating at home. Once the guardians are engaged with the programming, it is more likely that the practices will continue once children leave Pike View and enroll in elementary schools across the city. >>



▲ *Garden coordinators periodically plant “surprises” for the young students, such as these spring daffodils. Otherwise, teachers and students choose what to plant.*

MORE THAN A GARDEN

>> Pike View has extended their food education in terms of facilities as well, installing several garden beds on their grounds which serve a number of purposes to both the school, and the community. The children are able to use the garden as a tool to help them understand where food comes from and the process of planting a seed in the ground and doing the work required to see that seed grow.



The children also use the garden as part of their curriculum. The gardens provide children with lessons in science, opportunities to draw what they grow, and even a chance at creating their own maps. Veit-Edrington shared an example of the children of one classroom using the garden to work on their problem solving. The students were tasked with figuring out how to bring water from the classroom to the garden using the quickest route. The children had to figure out how much water they could carry at one time, which hallways they should take and how many steps and doors they would have to navigate. In this way, the garden becomes the classroom, nurturing exploration and problem-solving.

“Children do not have contact with the earth that I had as a child.”
-Jody Veit-Edrington



▲ *Students at Pike View Early Childhood Education Center look forward to tasting the fruit of their labor. In addition to plant life, students gain experience with school animals, feeding a pair of rabbits, a bearded dragon, a spotted gecko, and three turtles.*

The key to the school’s success in implementing their food-based education was starting small and making sure that they had buy-in from the staff. The original garden plots for each teacher started as 2’x2’ and have since expanded to 2’x4’ as teachers asked for more space for their classes. Now there are 17 4’x8’ beds. Veit-Edrington reports the last thing they would like to incorporate is an expansion of the farm to school programming in North Little Rock to bring local produce directly into the cafeteria. ☞

M any thanks to Jody Veit-Edrington, coordinator of early childhood education for North Little Rock School District.



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