

The Pennsylvania Farm to School Network Success Story:

HANSEL AND GRETEL EARLY LEARNING CENTER

Dauphin County, PA



Sarah "Sally" Runkle is a kindergarten teacher at Hansel and Gretel Early Learning Center, located in Dauphin County, and has established and maintained two small gardens at the center with the support of all school staff. Each year's kindergarten class, as part of the science curriculum, plants sunflower and marigold seeds in cups for Mother's Day and to transplant during the last week of school into the school vegetable and flower gardens.

The students are always eager to help in the garden. As they weed, water, and harvest, Sarah sees them work together and listens to them discover new things:

This watering can is heavy when it's full of water, but I can carry it. I'm strong."

"That plant smells good, like toothpaste."

"Feel the stem on this sunflower. It's prickly. It looks like it will be soft but it's not."

"I wonder how basil tastes. I'll take some along to try."

"The real word for dirt is soil."

"There's an ant (or a spider or a worm)! We respect animals and plants and nature."



Hansel and Gretel has a strong Summer Camp program, which many children from the previous kindergarten class attend, as well as elementary school children. During the first week of Summer Camp, the children help plant vegetables in the garden.



Can we plant the seeds that I brought from the apple that I ate at home last night?" one child asks. "Or the avocado seed that I brought from the avocado that I ate at home? Can we plant the seed that I found in my orange slice at snack time? Or the one I found in my green beans at lunch?"



Throughout the summer, the children water plants, pull weeds, measure and record plant growth, and harvest vegetables.

"Look how big our sunflowers grew! The one that I gave my mom is growing really big, too."

"I want to measure that sunflower. How should I do it? I'll just go for it."

"That cucumber is shaped like a J or an N. This one is shaped like an O. I can almost spell my name with cucumbers."

"If you draw the pumpkin on your page and I draw it on my page, then we can connect them because that's how the pumpkins look."

They have grown peppers, cucumbers, basil, pumpkins, mint, sunflowers, marigolds and zinnias, to name a few, but "the true success always comes from the children," says Sarah. The growth in their confidence and teamwork and their sense of responsibility and pride is extremely valuable, as is their knowledge of where food comes from and how it grows."

"This is the best day ever!"

"Do we HAVE to go back inside now?"

– children at Hansel and Gretel Early Learning Center



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