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Lowell students dedicate their garden

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LOWELL — Students here are learning first hand about where food comes from by having their own garden in front of the town's graded school. On Thursday students dedicated their garden. Principal Scott Boskind said its all part of the Farm to School Program that operates throughout the year.

"This is the third year that we have our own garden," he said. "It's gotten better and more established every year."

Kristen Bowlin, education coordinator for the Green Mountain Farm to School program, said the students have worked hard ever since they started planting seedlings inside the school in March.

The garden dedication included an Abenaki drum performance, singing by students, and ceremonial planting by the students. It was to show students that gardening is for everyone, and it's essential for life. It also shows the importance of good nutritious food and how food is produced, said Boskind.

"There's a tradition that's connected to growing our own food," he said. "It's a way towards independence from relying on others for our food."

The garden club, which consists of about 10 volunteer students who maintain the garden, will continue to meet when school is out this summer. Students don't get any benefit from being part of the club, except through their own interest and satisfaction, said Boskind.

The purpose of the program is to bring more healthy food, that is served to students, into the school. Most of the food grown will be served with lunches and snacks next

fall, but some of it will be used by the school's Junior Chef Program.

Some parents, like Amy Olsen, are happy their children are working in the garden. Her daughter, Laura Masi, has been involved with the club since it started three years. One thing that caught her attention was seeing the kitchen staff collecting food to serve later in the day.

"We thought seeing food being collected in the morning to be served later in the day was cool," she said. "This also gives them a life skill and teaches them where food comes from."

"I like gardening," said Masi. "It's fun to be with all the people in the club."

Jenna Charland, a fourth grade student, joined the garden club for fun. She likes working in the school garden more than at home because she gets to be with her friends.

"The kids just love it," said cook Debbie Merrill. "As long as they know it comes from the garden they'll eat it."

Katherine Sims, executive director of the Green Mountain Farm to School Program, said her group works with 15 schools in the North Country Supervisory Union, Orleans Central Supervisory Union and the Lamoille North Supervisory Union.

And Sims hopes that number will continue to grow.

"We've seen an increased interest from schools about how to connect kids to healthy food choices and using gardening as a way to educate kids about nutrition and agriculture," she said.



Students from the Lowell Graded School explore their garden Thursday afternoon. (Photo by Christopher Roy)