



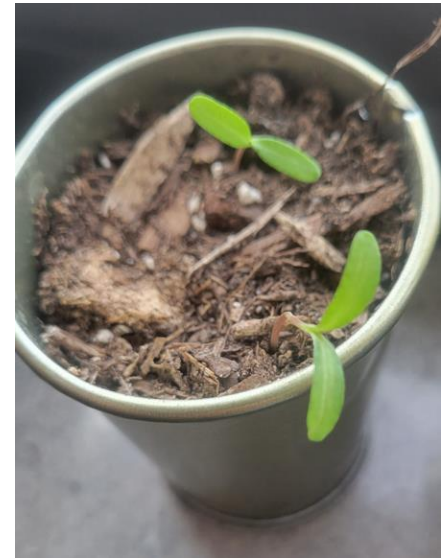
# Embracing the Challenges of a Variable Wisconsin Spring and a Continuing Pandemic

## *Gwen Murphy*



The highlight of Farm to School is getting students outside to experience nature's classroom, but what are we to do when the snow refuses to let up and billowing storms prevent even our most bundled students from coming outdoors. Normally, we would bring the nature indoors, but that can be a challenge in these uncertain pandemic times - thankfully the entire school system has come together to find ways to allow episodic educators to come indoors and make modifications to lessons so students are safe and can experience the curiosity that naturally ignites young minds outdoors.

After a warm spell earlier this March, we decided to do a pet plant lesson with all students to teach them scientific skills of observation and hypothesis as well as soft skills of responsibility and trying different approaches to solve problems.



We even learned about how to reuse containers for planting and how to conduct experiments! Like, what happens if a plant is watered too much or never sees the sun? Students made many hypotheses together! The first lesson was warm and balmy outside - students had to bring rain boots and a strong will to avoid jumping in all of the exciting puddles that formed from ice melt. They were able to explore new buds and dead stalks of a garden ripe in a change season before trying out gardening tools themselves to prepare a pot of seed planting. They had a great time playing while learning in the outdoor space and were able to make a hypothesis on how their own pet seedling would look when

it grew up based on the growing world they saw around them. Being outdoors allowed us to get a little messy with the dirt and watering because a little spill only helped the other plants growing around us!



It was a great day for all of those classes...unfortunately the next class that week was pelted with surprise freezing rain. We tried putting up tarps to shelter the students while still maintaining the outdoor classroom, but winds ripped the tarp quite terrifyingly around us which prevented students from staying engaged in the lesson. As the weather worsened, we made a plan to bring the classroom indoors so students could learn in an environment that was safe from the worsening conditions. You never know what to expect in a Wisconsin Spring. All classes since that first beautiful day have been held indoors as we have snow falling into April this year... but students paid attention and know what a plant needs to grow healthily! They have made sure their plants receive appropriate sunlight, water, airflow, and warmth indoors and sprouts are beginning to show. Students are responsible for watering every day and have their botanist recording journals to take measurements of the plants height, number of leaves, visual appearance, and other notable changes from week to week. Whatever the weather, students and teachers have remained flexible to bring nature wherever it needs to be in school so that we can all continue to learn together in changing times.

**Throwback to our one and only beautiful weather planting day... so far! :)**

