



# Waking Up the Greenhouse and Capitalizing on Community Support

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## ***Waking Up the Greenhouse***

Only a couple of schools in the Oregon School District have hoop houses of their own. One of these is Netherwood Knoll Elementary, which had one built about 5 years ago that fell into disuse when everyone went into quarantine in the spring of 2020. This year, we were excited to help revitalize the space and make it into something that students and classes could use. A couple of Netherwood teachers reached out early in February about creating a sensory garden and using the greenhouse to start the project, and we were delighted by their interest and happy to create something that would have stewardship in the years to come and that would benefit students directly. To get students and teachers involved from the start, they created a group of interested staff members who met to plan the division of garden plots that classes would steward. A small group of staff, with help from Maddie, cleared out the greenhouse later in the month, which gave us a great starting point for planting and a better idea of what was needed. Isabel spent time planning for lessons and supply purchases, from soil amendments to gloves to markers and popsicle sticks.

This week, students put their first seeds into the dirt, and many more will do the same next week. Each student will have a small container of seedlings that will then be transplanted later in the spring into the greenhouse beds, with the goal of harvesting their own produce by the end of the school year. Along the way, they'll learn about what plants need to grow, how to read seed packets and plant seeds according to the information on them, how seeds grow into food, and what categories food can fall into. They'll also learn about what their bodies need to be healthy, and the role that the food they are growing can play in keeping them healthy.

Hopefully we'll even plant food that they can come back in the fall and see growing outside, and harvest even after our current service members are gone. The idea is always to leave behind a continued impact, with teachers who know more about education in the garden and students who look forward to coming back to the space, regardless of whether we are there.



## ***Capitalizing on Community Support***

You've probably heard the old saying, "it takes a village to raise a child". Here in Oregon, Wisconsin we'd like to say that it also takes a village to build a thriving Farm to School (F2S) program. Over the past few months, we have been strategizing how we can better engage the community in Farm to School programs beyond the classroom. This starts with outreach - our Farm to School newsletters and Harvest of the Month posters that get sent home to parents and displayed in the help to spread the word about what we do here in our F2S program. We've noticed lots of positive responses from both parents and teachers who are excited and surprised to find out about the work we do in Oregon. But how can we turn these positive responses into actionable involvement? After all, our role as AmeriCorps service members is to help facilitate the stewardship of F2S by the community so that our shared mission can continue into the future, with or without our continued service.

To start unifying F2S stakeholders throughout the district, we took the initial steps in creating a task force. A F2S task force is a group of community members who help guide the growth of the program as well as take a leading role in the program - coordinating gardens, seeking grants, and promoting local purchasing habits for the lunchroom, to name a few. To start, we sent a message to all district staff and in our family newsletter, inviting people to apply for the task force. We received an incredible response and ended up selecting 16 individuals, from various roles in the community, to participate in our very first task force meeting. The goal of the first meeting was to begin defining a shared understanding of the vision and goals of F2S in Oregon. It was eye-opening to hear such a wide variety of perspectives. Yet, there was one theme that came through in what almost everyone shared: Our students come first. Farm to School is one way we can enrich the student experience and support them in their journey towards a happy and fulfilling life. Keeping this idea in our minds, we then turned our attention to actions and talents we can contribute to the program as individuals. It is safe to say that the conversation was absolutely buzzing with enthusiasm and fresh ideas!



Overall, these early explorations of a task force have already expanded our local F2S support network. We are looking forward to our upcoming spring meeting where we plan to continue discussions for growing F2S during the spring and summer, especially through student involvement in school gardens.