

Growing Healthy Kids: School-Based Solutions Take Root

Clinton County Health Department



The Clinton County Health Department and its partner, the Essex County Health Department, are transforming schools into places that have the capacity to support and promote healthy eating.

Room for Growth

Children spend most of their day at school, underscoring the important role that this institution has in promoting healthy eating. Unfortunately, data from school districts in Clinton, Essex, and Franklin Counties revealed limited access to and availability of fresh produce. Moreover, the data indicated that students consume few fruits and vegetables, and lack gardening skills and awareness of where food comes from.

School gardens can improve access to fruits and vegetables and build skills to support sound nutrition. Gardening gives students an opportunity to engage in small-scale agricultural practices and learn about the importance of farming. Despite interest in incorporating gardens into the school environment, several Clinton, Essex, and Franklin County school districts have experienced barriers. Long-term maintenance challenges (especially in summer), limited resources and time, and minimal staff buy-in were among the most common.

Growing Solutions: School Gardens & Grow Carts

Since 2015, Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) in Clinton and Essex Counties has been working with Wellness Committees in five school districts—Northern Adirondack, Chateaugay, Elizabethtown-Lewis, Moriah, and Ticonderoga—to support school-based food growing initiatives that include both outdoor gardens and indoor grow carts. CHSC has helped to tailor solutions to each individual district's needs and provide resources to

facilitate success. A thriving local food movement has provided additional support and helped reinforce the social norms of gardening and farming. As a result, two schools started gardens and three schools introduced indoor grow carts. The schools are growing these projects with sustainability as a top priority.



Chateaugay taste test featuring lettuce grown in the classroom

“When students grow their own food, they have pride in ownership, and are more likely to enjoy the produce.”
Julie Holbrook, Elizabethtown-Lewis food services director

With CHSC-supported gardens and indoor grow carts in place, students are planting, harvesting, and eating produce they have grown themselves. Schools have also incorporated gardening concepts into curricula to strengthen nutrition education. A local vendor, 2445 Organics, works with teachers and students to plant the first round of seeds and provide assistance, making lessons more interactive. Northern Adirondack and Chateaugay Central School Districts are using grow cart vegetables to supplement school meals and a la carte options. Moriah Central School District

garden beds were relocated to a more accessible location which resulted in increased interest and involvement. Ticonderoga Central School District started a greenhouse at the elementary school, and school gardens at the elementary and high schools. Their efforts are further enhanced through their partnership with the local Master Gardener program.

“Many students would not have tried a variety of lettuces, since most often they preferred iceberg. And now they are more open to trying a variety of other new foods.” Loretta Fowler, Superintendent, Chateaugay Central School District

Producing Results: Veggies Now Growing on Kids

In-classroom grow carts and school gardens have not just enabled students to grow food; they have provided many additional benefits. Nutrition education is more dynamic because of the involvement of community partners. Feedback from faculty, staff, and students has revealed that students are more likely to try and enjoy new vegetables because of their hands-on involvement. Staff also reported high yield from the grow carts with lettuce being harvested every 12-18 days, enabling the greens to become a regular offering in school meals. Each school has already expanded current growing projects because of the positive outcomes experienced to date.



to learn more...

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Taking Root

CHSC has connected schools with various local resources to help sustain these projects. Schools are enlisting community partners for help with summer garden tending. The Food Service Director at Moriah Central School District, for example, is engaging the local 4-H club and other volunteers to maintain their garden when school is not in session. Other schools have built maintenance of these projects into regular classroom activities or established subcommittees to oversee the projects. Excitingly, several schools received grants from ADK Farm to School and Eat Smart NY to enhance their growing projects. In addition to these successful partnerships, this work has been able to thrive due to the buy-in from the school community, including students, staff, parents, and administration.



Ticonderoga students and teachers tending their garden



**Creating Healthy Schools
and Communities**

The places where we live, learn, work, and play all contribute to our ability to become and stay healthy. Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC), a five-year (2015-2020) New York State Department of Health-funded initiative, is helping build stronger, healthier communities.