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Chesnut Charter Elementary Takes Science in the Garden

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According to the USDA ERS Food Desert Locator, about half of the 300 families sending to our school lives in a food desert, residing more than one mile away from a "healthy food retail outlet" (supermarket or large grocery store). Our school garden is a major change agent in our students' lives, by showing them how food grows and familiarizing them with different fruits, vegetables and herbs. We are so grateful to KGI for helping us build this program with the grant they awarded us earlier this year.

Specifically, we were able to respond to the outcome of our new Farm to School nutrition lesson "Tasting a Rainbow of Plants [1]" this November. After conducting a tasting of 10 fruits and vegetables, we surveyed the classes to find out which they would like to grow at Chesnut. It was unanimous: pomegranates! Students and teachers alike were surprised to find out they grow in Georgia. Thanks to the KGI grant, we added two 4' pomegranate trees to our garden this spring.

Secondly, we saw the need to increase classroom participation in the garden. This was starkly highlighted during the November lesson, when at one point a fifth grader asked to pull a whole food out of a bag, name it, and label it as a plant part, was stumped at what she pulled out of the bag. The vegetable she did not recognize was a stalk of celery.

Thankfully, our teachers have responded so positively to our efforts to use the garden as a teaching tool [2]. This year, when the second graders studied plant life cycles, all four classes did it in the garden, examining which plants were going to seed, and which plant parts we eat when we eat a certain food. They loved making their own "Garden Gum" as they dubbed it, by chewing on a stevia and spearmint leaf at the same time. Fourth graders made "epic" pesto, Kindergarteners asked for seconds of freshly harvested salad and cabbage slaw, first graders tracked the growth lettuce from seed to harvest.

In the background of the top left picture, you'll see a satellite dish and fencing. This year we received county approval to have these items removed as they are no longer in use and we have a much better idea for that space. Our new School Master Gardener team which includes three teachers and the school counselor, just completed their summer course and are planning to put in a pizza garden, using the funds from KGI. They propose teaching math skills by forming geometric shaped garden beds, in which the students will grow pizza toppings.

In addition to the grant, we are encouraged and inspired by this online community. It is a wonderful resource - thank you KGI for bringing us together!

Image (optional):

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