

Vision Becomes Reality For Lacey Spring Elementary

By MEGAN WILLIAMS

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LACEY SPRING — When Phil Satolli got to school on Wednesday, he realized that he left fresh pizza dough in his car overnight.

It was too late to use it for dinner that night, but still safe to eat, so the Lacey Spring Elementary School first-grade teacher decided to make an educational moment out of it. He took his class outside to the side of the school where the playground is — and where half a dozen raised garden beds are overflowing with produce, including fresh tomatoes and basil.

The students picked the pizza toppings and Satolli showed them how to peel, chop and crush tomatoes and other toppings. The students also picked basil leaves off the stem, and assembled the pizza together.

This teaching moment is just an example of the philosophy behind Lacey Spring's goal to cultivate healthy bodies, healthy minds and healthy relationships.

This is only Tammy May's second year as principal at Lacey Spring, but her dream of getting kids out of the classroom and outdoors, as well as using nature as a teaching tool, is coming together.

She began last year by creating an outdoor learning space, but knew she wanted a garden for students. Thanks to a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, an organization near and dear to May and a number of teachers at Lacey Spring, as well as help from Massanutten Technical Center, raised beds were put in over the summer and summer school students from Lacey helped plant seeds and watched them grow.

The school also has a rain barrel to supply water for the gardens, a four-bin compost system that nourishes the garden and a repurposed filing cabinet where seedlings that grow from the compost are transplanted.

“ We have these beautiful mountains,” May said, gesturing to the view from the side of the school. “ I just thought, ‘Why aren't we using this space more for hands-on learning and projects?’ “ The summer school curriculum was based entirely around the garden. Students measured plants, learned about life cycles and

“ Our cafeteria manager asked if she could cook up a whole mess of beans when these are ready,” she said.

Thanks to grant money, the school has also put in a greenhouse to get plants started and to grow year-round.

All lunch scraps are added to the compost pile. Satolli spearheaded the school's compost efforts by teaching his students last year about what goes into the green buckets on the cafeteria tables and what doesn't. From there, Satolli's first-graders trained the rest of the school in how to do this, until everyone was familiar with how to compost.

In January, the composting efforts only yielded 15 pounds of compost. In May, the last full month of the year, students composted 450 pounds of food scraps that would otherwise be waste, Satolli said.

“ I've had at least a dozen parents tell me that they've started composting at their houses” because of student requests, he said. The most recent grant that Lacey Spring received was also from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. They received \$3,700 to send 25 teachers to participate in a weeklong professional development training with Chesapeake Bay Foundation. This will involve three days on the Chesapeake and two days back home where the teachers will collect water samples, and do various water-related activities such as canoeing.

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discovered what happens when you don't water a plant adequately.

Students were excited to come back to school to see the yield of their labor. The bean beds are overflowing, as are the tomatoes and the pumpkins. There is one bed dedicated to pollinators, as well.

May said that last year the school started "tasting Wednesdays" where students have the opportunity to try various produce. The garden will be a great source for that, May said.

Lacey Spring Elementary School students pose for a photo with their plants at the raised garden beds.

Photos by Megan Williams / DN-R



Thanks to grant money and Massanutten Technical Center, Lacey Spring Elementary School has installed raised garden beds, composting bins, a rain barrel and a greenhouse.