

MASTHEAD HERE



A conversation with Jim Conlon, CEO

The importance of thinking small

The customers ate my homework . . .
try topping the Belfast middle school
students' pizza

Student at Troy Howard Middle School in Belfast

Homework Never Tasted So Good

Belfast middle school students grow their own pizza businesses from scratch

Business is booming in Belfast. In fact, entrepreneurs recently developed and presented plans for eight new pizza restaurants for approval. The average age of these budding business owners? Twelve.

Welcome to the Troy Howard Middle School, where students take part in what may be the most intriguing and well-integrated curriculum in the state. What started four years ago with a 35' x 48' greenhouse, two enormously dedicated teachers, and more than 100 enthusiastic students has become a model for education that has made headlines and spawned similar programs nationwide.

The centerpiece of the program is 'The Garden Project' where students take part in growing a broad variety of organic crops, both in the greenhouse and in outdoor gardens, raising more than two tons of vegetables last year alone. Students take home roughly 1,000 pounds of vegetables to share at the dinner table. They sell some of their produce at their own on-site farmstand (no calculators allowed) and some at the Belfast Co-op to provide income for seeds and garden implements. A large portion of their harvest is also given to the local soup kitchen, which serves 75 to 100 people every Friday. The kids also take a field trip to the soup kitchen once a year to experience how their efforts are making a difference in the community.

The Pizza Garden Takes Shape

Now in its fourth year, The Garden Project, founded by Agriculture Program Coordinator Don White and social studies teacher Steve Tanguay, continues to evolve. Each class



Don White and Steve Tanguay earned a national Excellence in Teaching Agriculture Award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2004 for their groundbreaking work in The Garden Project. (Posing here with one of their Pizza Garden students).

embraces the challenge of leaving the garden, greenhouse, and program better

"We encourage everyone [students] to ask questions, then we look for answers together. It's an interactive, think on your feet environment that promotes independent thinking."

Steve Tanguay

than it was when their academic year started. Thus, the program, the school, and the community continue to reap

rewards. Past projects have included building trellises for squash plants, building benches for the greenhouse, and creating a photo archive detailing past gardens and growing techniques. Of course, the teachers continue to fine-tune the program as well.

Because most garden-variety plant seeds are sown in the spring, it is up to the outgoing class to plant the seeds for The Garden Project for the incoming students who begin in the fall. Teachers and a handful of students take care of the garden over the summer. In the fall, incoming seventh grade students attend a comprehensive

ifarmerís market boot campî run by Tanguay and his teaching team. Consisting of 52 learning and testing activities, the boot camp helps students identify their areas of interest for the coming year.

îThis is very much a one-on-one, inquiry-based curriculum,î says Tanguay. îMany of us remember classrooms where teachers would lecture Monday through Thursday then give a test on Friday. Weíre about as far away from that experience as you can get. We encourage everyone to ask questions, then we look for answers together. Itís an interactive, think-on-your-feet environment that promotes independent thinking.î This approach has allowed the school to tie nearly every subject taught in the school into The Garden Project.

In the second year of The Garden Project, students grew all the ingredients to make their own spaghetti sauce, then students and parents alike celebrated with a giant spaghetti dinner. In the

Linda Hartkoph, an environmental educator and dairy farmer, was brought into the Garden Project to help with the curriculum development and outreach. îShe got the Pizza Garden idea off the ground and the team was off and running within weeks,î says Tanguay.

Today, the pizza garden grows almost everything needed to create pizza from scratchóeven the wheat! The only ingredients not produced on site are Mozzarella cheese and pepperoni. When the students arenít in the gardens or greenhouse, their indoor curriculum centers on understanding the connection between food production, healthy soil, the economy, Maine history, math and creative pursuits within their everyday lives. For example, students choose three pizza ingredients, trace each ingredientís origins, and learn how that ingredient came to be available in the United States. They also weigh the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing local ingredients versus imported ones and whether the prices they pay in the store



Students weigh vegetables in preparation for donation to local food pantry.

aftermath of the dinner, an idea took hold. What if students grew all the ingredients to make their own pizza? And, what if part of the exercise was developing business plans for their own pizzerias?

reflect the true cost of the product produced.

Bangor Savings Bank's Chris Nelson has been actively involved in the Pizza Garden project since its inception.

îTwo years ago, Steve Tanguay approached the Bangor Savings Bank Branch Manager in Belfast and asked if the Bank would like to get involved in The Garden Project,î said Chris. îI was intrigued by what they were doing and compelled to get involved. Am I glad I did! It has become one of the most rewarding aspects of my job. I come out of that school so recharged, because I get to see the enthusiasm of the kids first hand. These kids are the future of small business in Maine, and they are learning all the critical skills that they will need to be successful. I really admire Steve Tanguay, Don White and the other teachers and volunteers who have developed The Garden Project. Theyíve really found a way to make math, science, history, finance, trade and health studies interesting to these kids. I wish my daughter had this program in her school.î



Chris Nelson engages the students in an economics conversation during class.



Middle school students displaying the 18-plus ribbons their classmates won at the Common Ground Fair in Unity last September. The girls are standing next to the Pizza Garden display in the school lobby.

Creating a Restaurant from the Ground Up

Perhaps the most evident project where all aspects of the curriculum intersect is The Pizza Garden Project. Students are challenged to build their own pizza empire and they form eight teams. Each team develops a business plan that requires them to create a name for their restaurant and choose a location from eight possible choices (for example, downtown or in the food court at the local shopping mall). Each location includes baseline information such as square footage, monthly sales forecast, condition of the property, monthly rent, and a general comment about the location's potential.

Once the students have decided on a name and location, they present their completed business plans to a banking committee to obtain the necessary financing to get their business off the ground. The detailed business plan answers the same questions any aspiring business must answer when applying for a loan, such as: Who are the key employees and what are their responsibilities? How much inventory is needed? What kind of quality control procedures are in place? Who is the target market? Who is the competition?

What is the strategy?) How much money will be borrowed? What are the fixed and variable costs?).

Each team gives a 15-minute presentation in front of the Banking Committee, comprised of Tanguay and Chris Nelson, Chief Investment Officer of Bangor Securities, Inc. (a subsidiary of Bangor Savings Bank). The committee gives each team a credit score, which determines the interest rate on their loan - the higher the risk, the higher the rate.

These kids absolutely blow me away with their creativity and attention to detail, says Chris Nelson. To have a group of 12-year old kids so excited about basic economic principles, finance, and business is fantastic. This program really is planting the seeds of entrepreneurship in a state that thrives on it.

The culmination of the Pizza Project is making and serving the final product. The students and eight parent volunteers spend the morning making the pizza dough and the afternoon making the pièce de résistance. Says Steve Tanguay, Of course there's a great deal of anticipation around Pizza Day. It's really the test drive of each pizzeria's finished product. But these kids are actively engaged in learning all year long. The program simply wouldn't work if the kids weren't having a good time. And if they are engaged in what they are doing, held to a high standard, and being creative, what they are learning can't help but carry over into other disciplines. ❖

To learn more about the Troy Howard Middle School Garden Project, visit their website at:

www.sad34.net/%7esteve_tanguay/garden.html.

