

Planting the seeds for an urban school garden

By [Auditi Guha](#)

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NEW BEDFORD — Starting this spring, students at the Elizabeth C. Brooks School will get down and dirty as they learn to garden and grow their own food.

“The goal is to have a community garden in every school in five years,” said Zoe Hansen-DiBello, coordinator of the Marion Institute's Grow Education initiative that will provide the tools to incorporate food and gardening into the curriculum. The hope is that school-based gardens will increase accessibility to locally grown food and strengthen community collaboration.

The first public workshop on building the community garden Tuesday solicited ideas from about 25 teachers, parents, children and neighbors.

“It will offer kids the hands-on importance of gardening that will stay with them forever and they will learn about science and botany,” said School Committee member Marlene Pollock.

Brooks student Kevin Ayala, 9, said he is excited about gardening at the school and would like to grow cabbage, tomato and sweet potato, things he likes to eat.

Bill Braun, a farmer adviser to the program, said he is looking forward to teaching children how to grow food.

“They're like sponges and get it in a way adults often don't,” he said.

Brooks Principal Kevin Sullivan walked those in attendance to a built-in planter in a corridor overgrown with succulents.

“We've managed to keep it green and our kids learn early not to touch it,” he said, pointing to the cacti.

Frosted windows by the planter overlooked a desolate square with two straggly trees where the community gardens will be created in raised beds.

Ideas included growing tomato, onion, celery, spinach, rhubarb, cabbage and year-round veggies. Others suggested a butterfly garden out front, vertical plantings indoors, themed beds to “grow” say, kale soup, and incorporating recipes.

Kindergarten teacher Regina Durant said her students enjoyed growing and taking home plants this winter. A writing project on the wall included sentences from each student about the project: “The seeds were so tiny” and “They need water.”

Grade 4 teacher Lisa Lavimoniere said the program is going to be a part of the class curriculum and will make for great learning and hands-on experience.

Since the project plans to involve the community, some neighbors stopped by.

“We want to learn how to garden and I think it's a good community program to teach my 4-year-old,” said Sherry McTigue.

The program will also be implemented at the Hayden-McFadden School this spring.