

Lowry's Garden Program Gets National Attention

Washington Dignitaries Visit Lowry: 2012 was an incredibly exciting year for Lowry Elementary and the Lowry Garden Program. The school was honored with a visit from Arne Duncan, the President's Secretary of Education, and Kathleen Sebelius, the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Lowry also hosted Governor John Hickenlooper, US Senators Mark Udall and Michael Bennet and the Denver Public Schools' Superintendent, Tom Boasberg, among other dignitaries. These important public servants visited Lowry in a large part because of the important work being done with students through the garden program.





The Garden Program: Lowry's garden program includes working with students to start vegetable plants from seed in the classroom, transplanting seedlings and nurturing these plants to produce vegetables in the school Victory Garden. Students harvest the produce which is served in the school's cafeteria (called the Garden to Cafeteria Program) and is sold in the on-campus Youth Farmer's Markets in the fall. Every student at Lowry, grade ECE through 5th has the chance to be part of these fun and educational activities.

The gardens on the Lowry campus that are part of the Garden Program include the Victory (vegetable) Garden, the Lowry Orchard, the Serenity Garden and the Front Circle Garden.

Denver Urban Gardens, the Denver Metro community garden organization, with the help of school families, constructed the Victory Garden, based on a design by a school parent. The Victory Garden has a two-fold purpose—to use the gardening experience to extend classroom teaching through hands on, interdisciplinary learning, and to improve the eating and health habits of the school's children. The garden program is continually evolving to make the best use of the gardens during the school year to teach the students not only about life science, agriculture, and healthy lifestyles, but also about community service.

The Victory Garden consists of six raised beds measuring 6 feet by 15 feet, plus additional at-grade beds for sprawling plants such as pumpkins and squash. The garden includes compost bins to recycle old garden materials and food scraps, and to teach students about life cycle and soil science.

Lowry students, their families and neighborhood middle school volunteers planted the Lowry Orchard in 2010. The orchard was funded in large part through a grant from Whole Foods and consists of two peach, two cherry, two apple and two pear trees. In the fall of 2012 students harvested the first small crop of cherries and peaches. As the trees mature, the fruit will become part of the Garden to Cafeteria Program, thereby providing food for the cafeteria's salad bar.

The Serenity Garden was the first garden built by the Garden Program, and is located at the north entrance to the school. School families designed and built this beautiful sensory garden to be used as an outdoor classroom and space for special school events. This garden includes a gazebo, designed and built in 2012 by school families, and dedicated to Cari Riedlin, the school's past Principal. The original funding for this garden was provided by school family donations and purchases of engraved stepping stones.

The Front Circle Garden was built in 2010 with the help of a grant from the Lowry Foundation, by the 2010 5th grade class. This red-white-and-blue garden provided a major improvement to the front entrance of the school, and has become more beautiful with each passing year.

Garden Partners: The Lowry Garden Program thrives with the involvement of many school families who participate in volunteer days and who help with planting, maintenance and harvesting. The program also benefits from the assistance and expertise of the Slow-Food Seed-to-Table Alliance, and Denver Urban Gardens, who were instrumental in building the Victory Garden and who continue to support the Garden to Cafeteria and Youth Farmer's Market Programs. All of the gardens were originally funded and are currently sustained through generous corporate or foundation grants, personal donations, plant sale and Youth Farmer's Market proceeds, stepping stone sales and thousands of hours of volunteer time.

Current Projects: This spring, students will be starting vegetable seeds in the classroom and planting seeds directly into the garden. Tomato, basil, onion, broccoli, cauliflower, pepper, eggplant, herbs, chard, okra, sunflower, and other seeds will be planted, some grown indoors on light shelves in the school's atriums. During Earth Day week, classes will come out to the Victory Garden and transplant seedlings into larger pots and into the garden. In May, each student will have the opportunity to take a seedling home.

There are three garden clean-up days scheduled where families will remove debris from the beds, amend the soil with compost and prepare the gardens for spring planting. The scheduled work days are April 6th, April 14th and April 21st. With all of the student and family volunteer involvement, there will be a growing garden through the summer. By the end of the school year, the garden will be thriving and producing a healthy harvest for students and school families to enjoy throughout the fall.

For more information, or to get involved, contact Lisa Emerson, school parent and Garden Co-Chairperson at 303-378-7664 or lemerson8@msn.com. Additional information on local school garden programs is available at Denver Urban Gardens' website: <http://dug.org/> and at Slow Food Denver's website: <http://www.sfdseedtotable.org/programs/schools>