Woodville School’s Outdoor Classroom Provides Hands-on Learning Opportunities

This Spring, the Wakefield Educational Foundation (WEF) awarded Robin Litwalk, Occupational Therapist, and four first-grade teachers at the Woodville Elementary School grant funds to implement an outdoor science program. The Woodville School utilized and expanded their existing community garden and transformed the space into an outdoor science classroom. Green City Growers of Somerville, MA was hired to support the science curriculum and provide professional advice around best practices for growing vegetables.

The purpose of this outdoor garden was to bring hands on learning into the first-grade science curriculum. The students observed plant structures and functions and learned what plants need to grow. The outdoor classroom provided tactile and visual evidence to explain that plants have roots, stems, leaves, flowers and roots that are used to take in water, air and other nutrients. The outdoor classroom provided a hands-on space to observe, collect and analyze data along with the opportunity to compare and contrast different kinds of plants.
Ms. Litwalk submitted a grant application through WEF’s annual grant process. WEF strongly encourages staff and PTO leaders to submit environmental projects for consideration. To support the grants process, WEF raises funds throughout the year by conducting fundraisers such as: the WEF Wakefield Public Schools Calendar, which showcases student art throughout the system; Chocolate Rose sales; the WEF Annual Adult Spelling Bee and community donations. WEF has awarded staff and PTO leaders just over $25,500 for the 2017-2018 school year and has awarded over $320,000 to the Wakefield Public Schools since 1989.

Ms. Litwalk and the first-grade teachers would also like to thank the following groups, individuals and businesses for their support of this project: The Woodville PTO, specifically PTO President Beth Williams, for their support, funding and labor; Home Depot of Reading, especially Department 2122 for their help with choosing wood for the beds and support in purchasing the wood. Robin wishes to recognize her husband for building the new garden beds and Woodville student Jack Hurley's father for his efforts in moving the existing beds from the front of the school to their new location in the back. Lastly, thanks to Maria Serrao, WPS Director of Facilities, for her support.

Above: First-grade teachers and their students, surrounding the Woodville School’s Outdoor Garden.