

FIT TO LEARN TIP SHEET

# Garden- Based Learning



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**School gardens allow students to participate in hands-on activities. School gardens can strengthen academic and social skills as well as allow students to develop life skills in areas such as nutrition, leadership and decision-making. Through a school garden, students can learn about and practice healthy behaviors in an exciting, hands-on way. Chicago Public Schools supports more than 400 schools with a school garden through various initiatives.**

### **Why is This Important?**

Studies link green space with better health and wellness—and even improved grades. Additionally, a host of research shows that green space makes neighborhoods safer and communities healthier. When secondary outcomes are considered, such as more creative play, physical activity and community engagement, the list of benefits grows.

Time spent in nature has also been linked to decreased stress, mitigated attention deficit disorders, better eyesight, less asthma and improved Body Mass Index. People are happier in nature; sometimes just looking at nature can reduce stress.

### **Try These Quick Tips**

- Decide what type of garden would work with your school environment (container, raised beds, modular garden beds)
- Establish a garden team that includes teachers, students, parents, administration, kitchen staff and partners
- Consider reaching out to local businesses for donations to offset the cost of establishing a garden or search for grants
- Visit other school gardens to get ideas

### **Best Practices**

- Recommended touchpoints for students is two to three times per month
- Use authentic learning experiences connected to the school garden
- Connect multiple core subjects to garden learning such as science and math



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## School Gardens at Chicago Public Schools

### CPS School Garden Policy Recommendations

The Office of Student Health and Wellness (OSHW) recommends that all school gardens are well-maintained and fully integrated into the classroom and school culture. Additionally, schools should:

- Review the CPS Food Safety requirements if you plan to serve garden produce in the dining center
- Integrate your garden into every grade level and content area to create as many learning opportunities for your garden as possible
- Maintain a garden team of at least three staff members to coordinate the upkeep of the garden

- Use your garden for community engagement
- Ensure staff attends at least two school garden-related professional development opportunities annually
- Allocate resources for garden upkeep on an annual basis
- Weave the garden into the school culture

Learn more about resources CPS offers at [cps.edu/OSHW/Documents/GrowWELL\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://cps.edu/OSHW/Documents/GrowWELL_Toolkit.pdf)

### CPS Resources

The CPS Office of Student Health and Wellness has compiled a variety of resources to help your school provide access to school gardens:

- CPS LearnWELL Toolkit. With practical tips and ideas. Available at [cps.edu/oshw/Pages/LearnWell.aspx](https://cps.edu/oshw/Pages/LearnWell.aspx).
- CPS Eat What You Grow! This food safety program provides guidance that certifies schools to eat garden produce with their students. To learn more and register for future trainings, contact Student Wellness at [studentwellness@cps.edu](mailto:studentwellness@cps.edu).

- The Green Teacher Network is a partner of CPS and offers access to teacher-training sessions and special events focused on the use of plant-based learning. Visit its website for more information [chicagobotanic.org/education/teacher\\_programs/gtn](https://chicagobotanic.org/education/teacher_programs/gtn)

### Gardens and Meeting Wellness Policy Requirements

Effective use of the school garden can help schools become LearnWELL and align with CPS wellness policies through:

- Physical Education (movement required for garden maintenance)

- Nutrition Education (incorporating into any garden activity)
- Outdoor Learning (teaching a lesson outdoors)
- School Food (becoming an Eat What You Grow school)



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## Additional Ideas

### Celebrations and Fundraising

Hold planting and harvest celebrations and raise money by growing and selling seedlings.

### Movement Minutes

Take your students to the garden for at least one movement break a month (weather permitting) to move around and maintain the garden—all at the same time!

### Nutrition Education

The garden is a nature place for nutrition education. You can regularly incorporate nutrition education into any garden activities.

### Outdoor Play and Learning

Teach in the garden, enjoy recess in the garden—the garden is part of a larger outdoor space that should be explored.

### Parent Engagement

Have at least one non-staff volunteer on the garden team.

### Physical Education

Discuss the muscles and movements required for turning soil, getting near the ground, weeding and other garden activities.

### Rewards

Cultivate the garden as a space seen as a reward to be in.

### School Food

Eat from the garden! Become Eat What You Grow certified and serve garden produce in the dining center or for snack.

### School Leadership

Connect your garden team with your wellness team.

## Garden -Based Learning Classroom Book List

Book Title	Age Range	Author
How Did That Get In My Lunchbox?: The Story of Food	5-8 yrs	Chris Butterworth
The Omnivore's Dilemma: Young Readers Edition	11 yrs +	Michael Pollan
Tops and Bottoms	4-7 yrs	Janet Stevens
Gardening Lab for Kids: 52 Fun Experiments to Learn, Grow, Harvest, Make, Play, and Enjoy Your Garden	5 - 12 years	Renata Brown
From Seed to Plant	4 - 8 years	Gail Gibbons
The Curious Garden	4 - 7 years	Peter Brown
Carrots Grow Underground	4-8 yrs	Mari Schuh
Compost Stew: An A to Z Recipe for the Earth	4-8 yrs	Mary McKenna Siddals
The Summer My Father Was Ten	5-9 yrs	Pat Brisson
Wiggle and Waggle	5-8 yrs	Caroline Arnold