

REAP FARM TO SCHOOL & COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: EAST HS GREENHOUSE



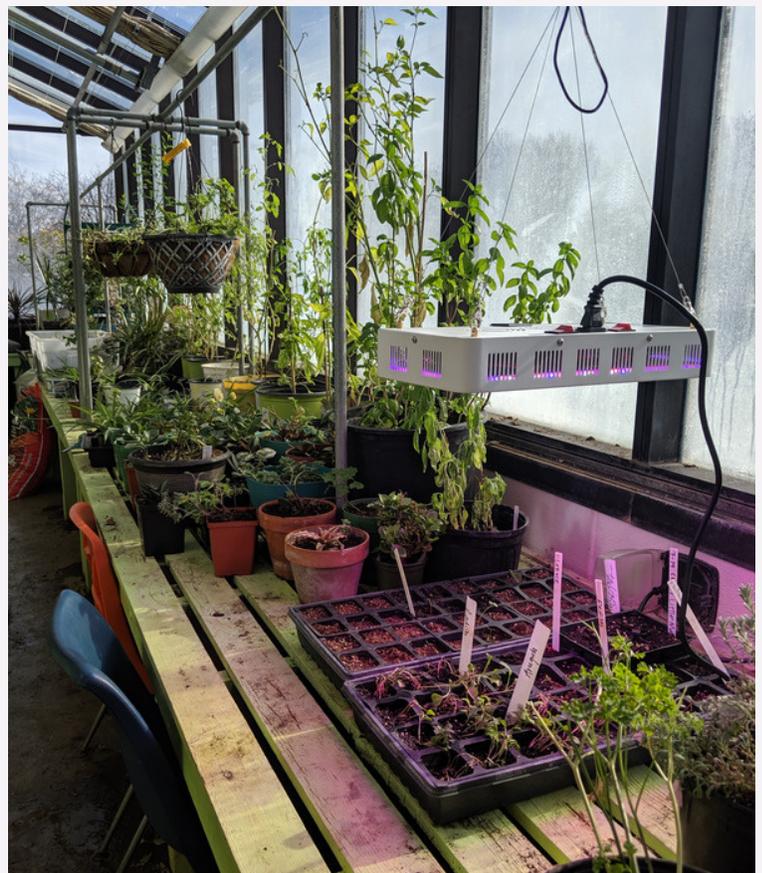
Darius transplants vegetable starts. He interviewed for a position with Klein's Greenhouse in 2020

East High School has not one, but two greenhouse spaces - practically treasure when it comes to bringing the "farm" to school in Wisconsin. The growing seasons can be bountiful, albeit short without certain infrastructure and support, especially in the school environment.

One of the greenhouses at East is attached to a science classroom upstairs and filled with growing projects by two urban agriculture classes offered each year.

The second, visible from East Washington, remained unused by students for years. School staff would rescue house plants that needed wintertime TLC, or enjoy lunch in the sun. Then, the occupational/ physical therapy and special education staff began sowing ideas of how to grow the potential of the space as a place to engage students in horticulture, vocational practice through building routine and problem solving, and cultivating an area for mindfulness. Building on many years of Farm to School engagement with East Culinary Arts, REAP staff supports the project through initial fundraising, greenhouse maintenance, and student engagement. The project now has roots throughout the school community.

North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) Youth Educator and Rotary Foundation of Madison supports opportunities for East High School, led by students and staff in the occupational and physical therapy and special education departments, to grow, taste, share and sell vegetable, herb, and ornamental plants in underutilized East High School greenhouse.



A group of 35 students has access to greenhouse activities, with a handful choosing to engage on a daily basis. In spring of 2019, students and staff grew tomato, herb, and house plant seedlings for sale to the school community, raising over \$400 dollars to put back into the program. Not only will plant sales sustain program funding, but it demonstrates real world concepts of vocation and food systems exchanges to the student body.

The next fall, students grew enough basil and tomatoes to supply five culinary classes for their Italian cooking lab. This connected the dots not only between two student groups who otherwise rarely cross paths, but also from student led seed to plate.

The team of students and teachers tend to house plants year round, and have such success transplanting that they often run out of pots. Growing house plants alongside food provides students with opportunities to experience different plant growth cycles and pest control techniques.

“ The ability to come in here and see the life transform from seeds and soil into the actual finished product, [the students] always seem to love it, said MMSD occupational therapist Seth Jawitz-McClellan. ”

To date, the East students and staff have raised over \$550 dollars in plant sales, taken home herbs to share with family and friends, and sought ways to make the space even more accessible. In early 2020, we brainstormed with an MMSD facilities director on the cost and process to install a greenhouse fan donated from the UW-Madison Horticulture Department.

While the pandemic has changed or halted many school programs, the East maintenance staff graciously cared for the plants when students and staff had restricted access to the building. Now, a group of 12 students and staff are able to safely engage and learn in the space throughout the week, with continued help from the maintenance team.

In addition to planning another plant sale, students are now working on growing their food production skills by cultivating lettuce and herbs for salad kits to be shared with students currently learning from home. REAP can't think of a better way to stay connected in difficult times than sharing good food.



A watermelon grows in early September - one of the more ambitious attempts at growing fruit, along with citrus



Cross Categorical instructor Seth Jawitz-McClellan cuts back a house plant on a chilly winter day



Winter provides another great opportunity for plant sales. Here, students dressed spider and aloe in holiday cheer



Seed starts take a break from high powered grow lights - only necessary for a short time with all the natural light the greenhouse receives