

February 6, 2018

Hello,

My name is Heather Sperling. I live in Marlboro with my husband and three daughters. I've been teaching at NewBrook Elementary School for 10 years.

I'd like to thank you for your support of Farm To School. It's really important!

I have a story about a little boy, I'll call him *Gabe*. *Gabe* was a child who came from a difficult home. He needed a lot of emotional support in order to get through his day at school. Most every day he had emotional meltdowns, especially when he was asked to work at a table in a traditional way- even if the activities were engaging to most others- it was too much for him and he felt like a failure. He would often express his frustration, "I can't do anything right!". I knew this was a big problem, not only for *Gabe*, but for the rest of the classroom and school community. If one member of your community is struggling, it affects the whole.

During the course of the year I had *Gabe*, I began to implement more farm to school curriculum. I was hesitant to do this at first, because *Gabe* wasn't the only struggling student in the class. There were many others who had challenges and as a whole class they were extremely difficult to manage. I was worried that an activity that drew extra excitement would snowball into a "wild" mess! Even though it was a bit scary, I started planning a nutrition and cooking project each week. The projects incorporated listening, speaking, math problems, writing and reading. Or, we'd spend time outside in our school garden, planning, working, measuring, tasting and journaling.

Gabe shined during these project based activities. He beamed! For the first time we say his true self. He became excited about learning and teaching others. Not only did this benefit him, it also had a ripple effect on the wellbeing of the classroom community as a whole.

In the past, many of the children in our schools came from stable homes where there were two parents and less addiction and distractions. Farm To School offers hands-on learning. The kind of learning that would have been valuable in any era, but is absolutely necessary today in order to lift and engage our kids and bring community together.

My husband is in our district and teaches middle school. During one of his units, he posed this question to his students, many of which came from our elementary school. "When have you felt most part of a community?" Quite a few responded that "Farm and Field Day", an annual Farm To School event our school puts on, was when they felt a sense of community most in their lives."

In order to expand this programming to all Vermont schools and communities, we need you to step up and increase your support. As our schools are being consolidated and boards are becoming bigger and further removed from their local communities and local support- **NOW IS THE TIME!**

Thank you for your consideration.