

Sabrina McDonough
Shrewsbury Mountain School
February 12, 2025
Farm to School Awareness Day

Good afternoon. My name is Sabrina McDonough and I am a fifth and sixth grade teacher at Shrewsbury Mountain School in Shrewsbury, Vermont. I am here in support of the farm to school and early childhood grant programs, and ask that you continue to support these programs with level funding base appropriation of \$500,000 for the coming fiscal year. Additionally, please continue to support the local food Incentive Program for Schools at a \$500,000 level, funding base appropriation.

These grant programs have helped our school create systems and structures which provide children with opportunities to connect directly with the food they eat, while also building relationships with community members. Previously, our school garden was only used by one or two classes. Funding from the Farm to School grant allowed us to make changes to the structure of the garden so that each classroom has its own bed, as well as adding fencing that created a more viable garden that could be used as an outdoor classroom space, which all teachers can now access.

This work has allowed more students direct experience with a garden, while also promoting working relationships with local farmers and our local agricultural organization, SAGE, as we plan, prepare, and plant our beds. Not only do students enjoy the experience of working outdoors and growing their own food, they are able to make connections with other curricular content, whether it is determining the volume and cost of soil for our raised beds, or observing pollinators at work. These experiences are further enhanced by using the harvest from the garden when cooking. Through the grant funds, we were able to purchase and stock two cooking carts, which each class uses to create dishes from Vermont's Harvest of the Month program, sampling local produce and new and interesting recipes. Recently, our third and fourth grade graders cooked lemon herb roasted beets, while my own students prepared sweet potato tater tots.

Perhaps the event that best highlights students' connection to the garden and their willingness to try new foods is our harvest festival, where each class prepares a dish for the rest of the school to sample. This year, my class created an eggplant curry, a new tasting experience for most. This celebration of our work gives us a chance to gather as a community, recognizing the roles that we all play in tending the garden. Along with the

efforts for redesigning the garden, the Farm to School grant allowed us to plant a small orchard and implement a composting system.

Two years ago, all students from pre kindergarten to sixth grade, worked with staff from ReTreeUS to prepare the ground and plant several fruit trees on our campus. The children are amazed at the longevity of this project, noting that many of them will be attending our local middle and high school when we harvest our first fruits. This has not stopped them from appreciating the endeavor, and in fact, we have dedicated tree stewards in our third and fourth grade students. Composting is the most recent system that we have adopted. Just as we have stewards for the trees, my fifth and sixth grade students have become the leaders of our composting. Grant funds allowed us to construct a shed and secure bins that will be a part of the school for years to come. I now turn this over to my students to share their thoughts. Thank you for listening.

Quinn
Shrewsbury Mountain School 5th Grade Student
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Hi. My name is Quinn, and I'm in fifth grade at Shrewsbury Mountain School. When I was in third grade, my school planted trees to create an orchard on a part of our playground. When I helped plant the trees, it brought our school together as a community. It helped me learn the process of planting trees and taking care of them, too. We mulch the trees as well as digging out the snow around the trunks in winter to keep mice from ruining the young trees. Now I am in fifth grade. Our new third and fourth graders take care of the orchard, which, in years to come, the orchards will give us apples, pears, and peaches for snacks and cooking. Thank you for your time.

Michaela,
Shrewsbury Mountain School 6th Grade Student
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Hi. My name is Michaela Aveda, and I'm in sixth grade at the Shrewsbury Mountain School. Today, I'm going to be talking about our garden and why school should be able to have one. All of the plans we have in the garden we use for cooking and making dishes with a class, which is to support the pollinators. In the fifth and sixth grade class, we help out in the garden by taking care of the weeds and putting mulch down so that we can plant more things.

I think that the garden is a way that we can bring the community together, because we all have to work together to make sure that the garden is healthy. One thing I thought about the garden is that we all have a part in taking care of it. So I think that brings some responsibility to your actions. We even have an eco-friendly decomposition system, where we have scraps for our food at lunch or snack. We have a compost bin that we take out to our decomposition system, where we turn our compost into fertilizer for the gardens so that the food doesn't just go to landfill and damage the environment even more.

Ben McGill and Elliot McDevitt - Student Duo
Shrewsbury Mountain School 6th Grade Students
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Hello. My name is Ben McGill and my name is Elliot McDevitt. We are in sixth grade and we go to Shrewsbury Mountain School. We are here to talk about the composting system in our school and why we think you should support programs like this. Our fifth and sixth grade classroom has started using the composting system this October, and it has helped us learn more about systems and our environment in ways that we will be able to learn in the classroom. Composting has helped us better understand the process of food and matter breaking down in an ecosystem. Twice a week, three of the students in our class go out to our composting shed with a volunteer. We use a recipe which includes food scraps and other materials to make sure that our compost is healthy. We also gather data to monitor and observe the health of our compost pile. Recently, we have noticed that the compost temperature has risen almost 40 degrees Fahrenheit, which shows that it's starting to become active. On days that our school does not compost on site, the leftover food supports a local farm that raises pigs. It is important to keep this program and others like it going because it helps us learn more about how to protect the environment, so that kids in the future can have the same opportunities that we have. Kids at our school volunteer and enjoy

this activity because they want to learn more about how composting can help our school and local communities, as well as the planet as a whole.

It was good for us to have these opportunities to use our resources better and use the compost to enrich the soil of our garden, rather than buying new soil and putting food scraps into a landfill. We have had this opportunity to learn as well as interact with community members. Kids in the future at Shrewsbury, as well as other schools around Vermont, deserve to have this chance as well. Thank you for your time.