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For Immediate Release

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Garden Tasting Party Fun at Piney Woods Elementary

Third graders try foods they grew in school garden

(Mifflin, PA) October 22- The Mifflin Independent School District's Growing Great pilot program is in its second year at Piney Woods Elementary School and held the seasonal Garden Harvest/Tasting Party on October 21. This cross-curricular program has integrated garden-based learning all across the school while giving our students the freshest cafeteria food possible.

"All of the research shows that students who have positive experiences trying new foods at this age generally experience better nutrition throughout their lives," said Pam Beesly, nutrition services director. "This garden program is a success because it integrates hands-on science instruction, nutrition, and fun to get students excited about the foods they choose to eat."

Taking students out of the classroom has also led to the program's success.

"Last year was the first full year of the program, and we saw an increase of about 10% in third-grade science pass rates at Piney Woods," explained Holly Flax, the division's director of science instruction. "We've made this a key piece of the curriculum, and it seems to really be paying off."

The program has also been a benefit to operations.

"Our Nutrition Services Department didn't have to order lettuce for approximately three months," explained Darryl Philbin, assistant superintendent for operations. "Harvesting from the courtyard garden and serving in the cafeteria is not only amazing for our students, but it has definitely helped the bottom line."

Students are also raving about the fresh food.

"I really like kale chips and spinach," said Karen Filippelli, a third-grader in Mrs. Vance's class. "I didn't think I did, but I really do. Especially when I dip them in ranch dressing."

“Me too!” shouted her classmate David Wallace. “And it was fun to grow them all up out there.”

All in all, Principal Stanley Hudson, who initially had concerns about the project, is now its greatest supporter.

“I wasn’t sure about all this at first- there are a huge number of moving pieces,” Hudson said. “But I can honestly say this is one of the most transformative programs I’ve ever implemented. We intend to expand this to all grade levels in the next five years, and the district has plans to implement it at other schools as well.”

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