

The Total Farm To Table Experience
Hommocks Middle School
Mamaroneck School District, Mamaroneck, NY
Betty Comeford, Home and Career Skills Teacher

The greenhouse was established in Spring of 2013, having taken about a 2 year process to actually get it approved and built. The funding came from both a NY state education grant from my Superintendent Paul Fried and Meryl Rubinstein, the Assistant Superintendent for Business Operations, as well as a grant from the Mamaroneck Schools Foundation. I wrote the grant along with my Principal Seth Weitzman as a secondary sponsor. I have written grants every year to continue to enhance the garden, i.e. sprinkler system and this year I will be getting a new fence, all from grants awarded from the Mamaroneck Schools Foundation. They are strong supporters of our program.

The greenhouse (13'x26") was built on a vacant rooftop near my classroom so it makes it easy access for students to go back and forth from my class to the greenhouse. During the school day, the greenhouse door is always open so students can go in and out to see how things are growing. My Family & Consumer Science classes and my environmental after school club are the primary users of the greenhouse. In addition, special need students also work in the greenhouse and garden with their classes. Everything grown is started from seeds and then transferred to our outside garden in the spring. In addition, we sell plants we do not need in the garden to parents and faculty/staff. The produce harvested during the school year is used in the Family & Consumer Science classes. In the summer the garden is managed by volunteer students who meet me to check on the garden and harvest produce. Students deliver the produce to the Mamaroneck Food Pantry for distribution to families in our community. Students help with the sorting and distribution at the Food Pantry. In the Fall, my classes again utilize all the produce in the Family and Consumer Science classes. Sometimes we use produce on a school wide basis as we recently had a lunchroom microgreen tasting of micro celery; micro carrots; micro kale; micro mustard and micro radish. I would probably do more of that but I teach during 2 of the grades lunch periods.

This was some of the language I wrote in my original grant for why we needed it:

There is a national movement toward sustainability and an increased awareness for children to understand the environment and the role they play. With the Hommocks Greenhouse/Garden our children will be able to actively participate in this movement. An interactive, living learning environment will increase the awareness of the benefits and importance of the role played by local, organic, seasonal foods in a healthy diet and in the fight against the growing epidemic of childhood obesity and diabetes stemming from processed food, chemicals and eating the wrong foods. Michelle Obama's planting of an organic vegetable garden at the White House sent a powerful message of health, sustainability and self-reliance. She remarked that, "for children, food is all about taste, and fresh and local food tastes better." One year later she embarked on a national campaign to combat obesity and the White House Garden was an important first step. Obama says, "I was curious to find out whether kids connected with this issue if we talked about it in terms of fun and gardening." And they did. "Kids were fully engaged in the process of planting vegetables, watching them grow, harvesting them, cleaning them, and cooking them and eating them, and writing about how vegetables were their friends," she says. "So we thought we could be on to something here if we make this conversation a national conversation." Every child deserves an opportunity to have access to what is called the "people-plant" connection by understanding and exploring the natural world as well as learning first-hand the benefits of growing, harvesting and eating healthy foods. So too the Hommocks Greenhouse/Garden and the programs

designed around the Greenhouse will send a similar message of healthy eating, sustainability and self-reliance.

Foods and nutrition education is a fundamental building block of the Hommocks Family & Consumer Science middle school learning and the greenhouse can help deliver this content year-round. Often, in our society, the message of what the student is eating and how it is grown is disassociated. Having a Greenhouse to connect food production to food consumption is vital for the success of this learning objective. By using the Greenhouse effectively, students can track the entire chain of their food from planting to growing to harvesting to eating, a complete hands-on experience allowing them to directly experience and enjoy the many benefits of fresh, nutritious produce!