

Humboldt Learning Garden: The Magic of Gardening

By Michelle Tran



Standing before the Humboldt garden for the first time, I could feel the care and hard work of the Farm to School interns and instructors. Each garden bed neatly lined parallel to the fence and was filled with compost soil. While digging holes in the soil for the plants, the interns happily interacted and helped each other out. There were instances where they paused on digging to observe spiders that were crawling through the soil. Spiders give me goosebumps and that made gardening immediately less appealing to me. Even so, seeing the enjoyment on the faces of the interns made me think how nice it would be to be a Humboldt student in the fall, engaging in agricultural education and community teamwork.

The importance of understanding where your food comes from and how to grow, preserve, prepare, and serve is an essential part of food education. That is why SPPS Nutrition Services has partnered with Humboldt High School to build a school learning garden in Saint Paul. In the hot weather of mid-July, a group of summer interns and instructors are eagerly moving about in the backyard of Humboldt, building raised garden beds and planting crops donated from community organizations. Tomatoes, cucumbers, cilantro, green onions, and parsley line the garden beds, creating a fresh, green, vibrant atmosphere.

“Growing herbs was especially important to us.” says Jocelyn Mann, a student intern. For the interns this summer, their goal is to establish a school garden that will contribute to the Humboldt school community. They want to include food from the garden into their lunchroom to provide students with additional options, like herbs, to season food to their taste. Not only that, interns Victoria Lee, Sinella Caban and Molly Farrell, all agreed that this learning garden will help students learn more about where food comes from and the process of growing and harvesting food.

The experience so far has been exciting for all of the interns. During the planting process, the interns described planting as very relaxing. Victoria comments, “gardening is like watching a baby grow.” Jocelyn adds, “you get to grow relationships with each other along with growing a garden.” However, just because planting was relaxing, it was not always smooth sailing as there were challenges they faced before this point: they had to make sure to follow their plans, time manage, and be aware of the sunny and rainy weather when building the garden beds.



When speaking to Andrea Nthole, one of the two Humboldt instructors who will continue to oversee this project after the summer, she shares more of her aspirations for the garden. Humboldt previously had a garden that was taken down by construction at the high school. In order to give students hands-on experience of growing produce at Humboldt, the agricultural education team decided to rebuild the garden in a more visible area that will be maintained by Humboldt’s agricultural students starting in the fall. The garden will be multipurpose. As Andrea explains, “it will apply the three Cs: Classroom, Cafeteria, and Community.” Humboldt agricultural students will learn how to grow plants through the garden, having a space to experiment and develop innovations for better harvesting at school gardens. The crops from the garden will also be sent to the cafeteria for students and the end goal of this is to connect to the community. Not simply share the garden with the neighbors of Humboldt, but have students take their knowledge home and grow a garden of their own. This garden is the start of educating adolescents about food systems and reconnecting it to their own life and community.

As the summer progresses, the student interns and instructors are already expanding learning opportunities for food systems by building an aquaponics system in the classroom and continuing their renewal of Parkway Montessori’s garden before the new school year begins.

“It’s the magic of gardening!” Grow Our Own Coordinator Kirsten Saylor cheered. Gardening brings people together, nourishing community and relationships--something that is definitely taking place here in Saint Paul, at Humboldt High School, due to the summer interns.