

School Garden

Stepping out onto the Lopez Island school playground, you see common structures such as the swing set and the slides, but also something that isn't as common: three big hoopouses, several garden plots, and an orchard. Lopez Island School District has created the Lopez Island Farm Education (L.I.F.E) program to educate students, kindergarten through twelfth grade, about growing their own food and living sustainably. The L.I.F.E program is built on four principles: all children deserve safe, nutritious, delicious food; well-nourished children are better able to learn; positive childhood eating habits affect lifetime health, and healthy children are the foundation of a healthy society.

The L.I.F.E program's curriculum is divided into three main areas: the classroom, the garden, and kitchen and cafeteria. The garden curriculum takes the common theme of food and farming to teach lessons in areas such as math, science, art, health, and literacy. In garden class elementary students spend time in the classroom planting seeds to put under light towers to get them started until they're ready to be transplanted outside. In the garden, each elementary homeroom is responsible for one bed, so, as a class, the students learn to weed, water, plant, and harvest everything they grow. Once the students harvest the garden, they help the kitchen staff prepare meals for the entire school to enjoy. Kids are excited and eager to eat what they have grown, including greens, which at one time might not have appealed to them.

Although high school students don't have as large a presence in the garden as the elementary students, they can take classes such as Farm, Food, Sustainability, and Culinary. In the Farm, Food, Sustainability class, students travel to a nearby biodynamic farm, S&S Homestead, to learn and take part in sustainable systems that keep the farm healthy. The students learn to harvest vegetables and fruit and to preserve them, to make bread and cheese, to build fences and move animals, to seed and transplant. They also participate in discussions led by the owners of the farm, Elizabeth Simpson and Henning Sehmsdorf. The students are required to keep a journal documenting not only what they did and what they learned on the farm, but also what it means in a larger ecosystem. In the culinary class, students incorporate food from the school garden into planning and preparing meals.

Lopez Island School believes that as educators of our future generation, we need to prepare our students to be capable not only in academics but also in their knowledge of nutrition and sustainability. The L.I.F.E program creates an environment for students of all ages to connect and work together to reach their shared goal of growing and preparing, nutritious, tasty food, and to live self-sufficiently and sustainably.