



Golden Gate Elementary

5055 SW 20th Place
Naples, FL 34116

School Profile:

- Collier County Public Schools
- PreK-5th grades
- 947 students

Garden Profile:

- First year for this iteration of the garden program
- 60 3rd graders participate in garden
- No staff paid to assist garden
- No volunteers

General Garden Information:

A garden had been set up a few years ago by the Assistant Principal, but no teachers had expressed an interest. A new third grade teacher joined the faculty this year and cleaned up the garden, rejuvenated the soil, purchased tools, and organized three third grade classes to begin planting. We entered a national competition by Bonnie Plants to grow the biggest cabbage plants. It has been a HUGE learning process for all involved. The garden is along a path that the Golden Gate 3rd-5th graders see every day and has sparked an interest in everyone (including the faculty) – especially the EarthBoxes! The location is just perfect. The garden’s name is “The Cabbage Patch” and the student gardeners are the “Cabbage Patch Kids.”

The garden is approximately 100’ x 25’ and was planted entirely in edible plants, until the cabbage plants were harvested. Due to the end of growing season, we are replanting with quick-growing veggies and butterfly plants for the end of the school year.

The garden consists of six EarthBoxes and oval-shaped raised beds with irrigation heads in the beds.



Student Involvement & Education:

Every day on the way to recess, students stop by to weed, check for caterpillars, and note growth.

Thursdays are structured data-gathering days. I take two of my science classes out with their notebooks (Plant Journals), meter sticks, measuring tapes, and iPads to photograph the growth and research (insect identification, nutrient deficiencies, caterpillars, etc.). I am so proud of how they take this very seriously. They are more like scientists gathering data on Thursdays.

All the other days are more of the happy, fun weeding and deadheading time. During the spring, watering takes place every day. Even the EarthBoxes must be watered because the plants are so big. It is a wonderful incentive for students, too. Only the best behaved are allowed to be in the garden watering.

Garden Product:

Cabbages are sent home; however, there are more heads of cabbage than the families need. And they are HUGE! I may need the cafeteria to take some.

Parent Engagement:

The children have all taken a pumpkin seed/plant home, all got an extra cabbage to grow at their home, and recently each one potted up a swamp lily (*Crinum asiaticum*). Parents share that their children are very excited about growing things. We are now pulling the cabbages. I made coleslaw for 60+ children from an eight-pound cabbage. The administration loved that as much as the students. Parents are offering to cook their cabbages and send in enough for samples. They are pretty excited about the slow-cooked cabbage with crumbled bacon in it.

Goals:

Our Assistant Principal wants to quadruple the garden for next year. I will be the garden coordinator. My desire is to provide advice and support for other teachers and their students. I am not sure what I would like to do next year. I think growing only cabbages for one year is enough.

Additional Notes:

On March 10th, we had a group from AdvanceEd tour our classrooms. While the Garden was well groomed, we hadn't expected them to go outside and see it as that was not the purpose of the visit. The Assistant Principal said that all the group could say was "WOW!" when they saw the garden. On that same day, we had a surprise visit: our school had just met the criteria for becoming a Blue Zones Certified School and we were told the Garden had something to do with it.

My two science classes have been commended on our morning news show for all of their hard work and how it is paying off. Other teachers love to watch, but they tell me there aren't enough hours in the day to add yet another activity.

We test these children to death. They won't remember practice sheets, testing, computer reviews. They will remember what they did in the garden and that covers quite a lot of educational learning goals.

Contact:

Leah Ray, 3rd Grade Teacher, rayle@collierschools.com

Steve Brown, Assistant Principal, BrownSt@collierschools.com