



## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2016.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Category: \_\_\_\_\_

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Complete Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



## THE COUNTY OF LOUISA

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### 2016 Virginia Association of Counties - Achievement Award Submission

#### **STUDENT GARDENS AND BREAKFAST IN THE CLASSROOM PROGRAMS**

*A Louisa County Public Schools and the Louisa County Extension Office Partnership*

#### **OVERVIEW**

Childhood obesity and childhood hunger are serious problems in our society. By establishing a school garden and creating a new breakfast program, Louisa County's Moss-Nuckols Elementary School, in collaboration with the County Extension Office, is countering both issues simultaneously while enhancing instructional time and quality.

Childhood obesity can be mitigated when students learn about and eat more healthy and fresh foods. The innovative Moss-Nuckols Elementary School (MNES) Garden Program supplies fresh vegetables to the school cafeteria, and the garden is also a learning lab and a taste-testing facility. With guidance and oversight through the local Extension Office, students plant, learn, and even try the vegetables in "tasting parties". Certified Master Gardeners supervise planting and teach in-garden lessons intertwined with science Standards of Learning. School gardens are trendy, but the centralized control of the MNES project and the "two-bite rule" has driven unusual success.

Despite the fact that school breakfasts are available to all students, typically only one-third of elementary school students eat breakfast. That number drops significantly in middle school and high school students. To combat this trend, MNES established a Breakfast in the Classroom Program that has become a focal point of the morning. Students order meals through Google forms, and leadership students deliver breakfasts to each classroom in bulk. Participation has skyrocketed, reducing hunger in our student population.

*In the first year that both of these programs operated at the school, student success in SOL tests ended a multi-year drought in the school's accreditation.*



## **THE STUDENT GARDENS PROGRAM - LOUISA'S APPROACH TO THE HEALTHY EATING PROBLEM**

### *Introduction*

While school meals are created to be healthy, nutritious vegetables aren't always the most popular choice among students. The goal of the Extension/Nutrition Department partnership was to develop a two-pronged approach whereby students: 1) learn about plant science in a hands-on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) learning garden that supplies the cafeteria; and 2) actually eat and enjoy the harvested produce.

A "Fuel Up to Play 60" grant provided the funding to install the first raised beds in the garden. Students from Louisa County High School's FFA built the beds. The beds are planted in the spring and fall, with Master Gardeners teaching the planting lessons. Later in the season, the Nutrition Department team harvests and serves the produce in the cafeteria - but not before a tasting party with all of the growers.

The tasting party approach has generated a positive culture surrounding fresh food that is felt from the garden to the cafeteria and throughout the school. It's a fun time where students are shown examples of the vegetables that they grew in the garden, and then taste prepared versions of those foods. Few things will get children excited about trying brussels sprouts or bok choy, but knowing that they grew it themselves does the trick. The tasting occurs in a fun atmosphere in the cafeteria and is guided by the simple "two-bite rule," which requires each student grower to take two bites of each vegetable. As a result, we have seen all of our students try such diverse foods as arugula, kohlrabi, and kale (which is now actually a student favorite when prepared as kale chips). Students give their feedback as a group as each new food is tried, contributing to the fun. In surveys conducted after the tasting party, 89 percent of fourth graders reported that they would eat kale again, 73 percent would eat brussels sprouts again, and 52 percent said that they would eat arugula again. Additionally, when we offers these items on our menu, the students order them, eat them, and enjoy them.

To see these tasting parties in action, please view our short video at <http://tinyurl.com/MNESGarden>.



These results show that not only are we providing healthier school meals to students; we are giving them the exposures to different foods needed to diversify their diets and begin a lifetime of healthy eating patterns.

Another positive outcome has been the instructional benefit of learning plant lessons in the garden instead of in the classroom. Students enjoy “tickling” roots before planting, but they also learn better what roots are. Diagram knowledge can only take our children so far but experiential knowledge, like this hands-on STEM-style approach to plant science, is what truly helps young minds comprehend.

#### *Partnerships, Implementation, and Staffing*

School gardens rarely reach the MNES garden’s level of sustainability. The difference is the unique approach of managing the garden through the Nutrition Services Department (as opposed to using support staff or the PTA) with the ultimate goal of the garden being production yield (rather than instruction or beautification). This has led to successes in instruction, operations, community support, and most importantly in the wellness of students now and for a lifetime.

Capable collaboration between Randy Herman, Nutrition Services Supervisor, and enthusiastic Cafeteria Manager Cheryl Seay has been instrumental in maintaining interest in the garden by way of the cafeteria line. The partnership forged with 4-H Extension Agent Jenny Thompson transforms the beds from production space to learning lab several times a year. Her tasting parties and two-bite club memberships have made kids excited about trying new foods in a way they might never do otherwise.

The program is sustainable and successful, benefitting short- and long-term student health and providing learning opportunities for students. From an operational perspective, the program has reduced produce costs in the cafeteria while enhancing the quality of nutrition.

#### *Results*

- School Garden supplies enough greens for all cafeteria salads most of the year
- Students in 2nd and 4th grades receive enhanced hands-on plant science instruction, and begin learning a life skill
- Students are exposed to a wider variety of vegetables



- Consumption of popular garden vegetables such as sweet potatoes, kale, and brussels sprouts have increased dramatically when served in the cafeteria.

## **THE BREAKFAST IN THE CLASSROOM PROGRAM - LOUISA'S APPROACH TO THE HUNGER PROBLEM**

### *Introduction*

Despite the fact that more than 40 percent of the MNES student population qualified for free and reduce priced lunch, fewer than one-third were actually eating breakfast on any given day. Reasons vary from stigma (breakfast has been seen as only for students who qualify for free meals) to simply not having enough time in the morning to get to the cafeteria, wait in line and eat. At the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, the LCPS Nutrition Department followed up its success in the garden with a Breakfast in the Classroom initiative to increase the number of meals served daily. As the name implies, the program changes the location of breakfast from the cafeteria to the classroom, alleviating the "rushed morning" barriers to eating breakfast, and making it less clear who might qualify for free meals.

### *Partnerships, Implementation, and Staffing*

The school's student leadership group, the Pride Team, was tapped to provide assistance to younger classrooms, delivering meals, handing out orders, and opening milks as needed. Cafeteria staff labor was reallocated from service lines to meal bagging, and the need for cleanup in the cafeteria was eliminated. Pre-packaged breakfast options were added to the typical fare in order to increase convenience.

Because students arrive to the classroom earlier, teachers (particularly those in the upper grades) quickly realized that instructional time actually increased. Students get settled while breakfast is delivered, attendance and reminders are taken and given while they are eating, These factors combined with quick clean up time gets children ready to learn, with full stomachs, 15-20 minutes earlier than they had been during the traditional breakfast service.

After several years of leadership transitions and testing challenges, the first year of the breakfast program was also the first year Moss-Nuckols Elementary School broke out of its accreditation slump.



Our Nutrition Services Supervisor has spoken to numerous groups about the program's success, including a keynote speech at a Breakfast in the Classroom summit at the Governor's Mansion. The First Lady of Virginia came to MNES in May to observe the breakfast delivery process and thank staff for their efforts.

### *Results*

- One year participation increase in daily breakfasts served from 28% to 50%+
- Increase of 14,000 total breakfasts served to approximately 725 students
- Instructional time increased in upper grade classrooms by as much as 20 minutes per morning
- Reduction in tardiness, as students want to be in class in time to eat
- School achieved full accreditation after several years of failing to meet the mark

### **CONCLUSION**

This two-pronged nutritional approach at Moss-Nuckols Elementary School in Louisa County is making quality eating habits a focal point of each day. *This focus is achieving results in reducing childhood hunger, breaking the patterns that lead to childhood obesity, and even increasing student achievement.*

MNES has adopted a Breakfast in the Classroom program that has significantly increased the number of meals served by moving breakfast from the cafeteria to the classroom. Rushed mornings no longer prevent students from missing the most important meal of the day, and teachers report that instructional time has actually increased as a result. The school's garden is providing healthy fresh vegetables that are served in the cafeteria throughout the year, and students are learning by planting with Master Gardeners. To increase excitement around the program, the local Extension is providing a fun "tasting party" experience that has resulted in students trying new and different vegetables...and even liking them.

We are pleased with the results of this important effort, and believe they are improving the lives of our students as well as enhancing the educational experience they receive.