When most principals think of the school library, they think of the quiet hum of children reading, researching, and writing. At P.S. 54, a New York City DOE public school, a much different school library media center is transforming education. Past the bustling Bronx businesses and active bodegas, lanes of snarling traffic, drug-related activity, and commercialism at its height, students across various grades are learning citizenship and environmental stewardship. Boys and girls are diligently planting seeds in the library's garden after they listen to read-alouds about plant parts and life cycle. The children eagerly work with their hands and look forward to weeding and watering their crops. They run their little fingers through the dirt and argue over whose job it is to water. Students take turns filling watering cans and using the hose while running back and forth, making sure their plants are not thirsty. Since the school library media specialist has told classes that reading to their plants helps them grow, some students sit down stretching their legs as they bring down their heads and enthusiastically read aloud stories from their library books. Children chat excitedly, recalling the last Garden to Café event the library hosted. Real chefs came into the school and used the garden's produce to create taste test samples. Students were given jobs to help prep healthy foods like pesto from the garden’s basil.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY CHOICES
Through literacy and hands-on practice, the school library media center is instilling citizenship and opening up students’ interests to subjects they hadn’t previously been exposed to. Students have a better understanding of nutrition and contemplate daily how to make healthy food choices. The school library has partnered with Fuel Up to Play 60, and students not only realize the significance of being active for 60 minutes a day, but have gotten to meet NFL players and draft picks who further emphasize the role of a healthy diet. Student ambassadors have attended workshops with the school library media specialist to build a committed student-led team that works toward teaching the whole school population to eat more fruit, veggies, and dairy as snacks. Through library-led efforts, students are taking ownership in the fight against childhood obesity in a cross-curricular literacy-based unit. By hands-on participation, students are able to eloquently define composting as a worthwhile and necessary activity. They understand the value of reducing their garbage output and why it is important to compost. They realize the role they can play in their community and they anxiously scaffold teaching other children, parents, and community members how to live environmentally correct and care for our earth.

LINKING GARDENING TO LEARNING
Some of the lowest-performing students in the school are learning to follow directions, take responsibility, and use literacy as a means to investigate topics of interest. Scholars translate their new knowledge into different technology platforms, like iMovies, Prezi, and Haiku Decks. They stare in awe as they see their food garbage come out as soil for use in the garden months later. Children give great attention and constant care to their composting duties and revel when the compost comes to fruition as something tangible, relevant, and usable rather than just garbage filling up a landfill. Students begin to see that knowledge is a means to greater personal growth and can open up doorways to other opportunities. Students have been able to not only meet the CEO of Citizens NYC and local politicians for their water conservation efforts, but more importantly have come to understand the impact of their work toward contributing to a better society. Rather than just reading and viewing videos, they are learning through authentic environmental projects that they are powerful people who can help change the world one step at a time.

Beginning with read-alouds followed by accountable talk and hands-on learning projects, the school library media center is opening doorways into topics these inner city children have never imagined. Coming from a very low socio-economic background, many of these children have very limited exposure to situations different from their home life. At first, there are a few jokes about sifting through cafeteria garbage for compost material, but after hearing the book read aloud and seeing pictures and videos of other school children practicing environmental stewardship, P.S. 54 students become enthralled and competitive. Whoever gets more food trash can spend longer on the grinding machine. The Cafeteria Rangers quickly don their disposable gloves as they sift through lunch trash and claim half eaten oranges and apples to be ground up for compost. Boys and girls clean

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up hurriedly in order to fulfill their gardening and composting jobs. They take pride in their duties and know they must be well behaved as children compete for the different responsibilities.

**READING AND GARDENING AS STRESS RELIEVERS**

In this transient school population, scholars come to realize that reading can release stress and tension while simultaneously providing insight and a wealth of ideas. Children learn how to be more accountable for their carbon footprint as well as become compassionate, contributing citizens and community members. Students learn firsthand that they are capable of being responsible, giving, knowledgeable, and hard-working. Angry, frustrated children are guided towards peacefulness and serenity through active participation and the quiet but insistent expectations of the school librarian. Children who usually don’t participate or show a lack of interest and commitment develop listening skills and a work ethic that eventually gets transferred over to reading, library research, and technology presentations. Gardening through the library helps foster compassion, grit, and resilience as it promotes self-awareness and greater personal and academic growth. Introducing environmental awareness and stewardship in school library media programming helps reach a population that otherwise would not have had access to it. Students begin to analyze their actions and assess their own habits and behaviors. They are afforded time to create presentations that reflect and synthesize on their findings and revelations. The school library media center is one room within the school where children have the freedom to discover and follow their needs, dreams, and desires.

**BUILDING CURiosity AND INTEREST**

As each library class session brings the students farther along in their own quests for greater personal information triggered by curiosity, children unwittingly start to seek and check out more and more informational texts on various topics. After having seen the school librarian read aloud and followed the directions to establish a garden, make a compost bin, and learn how to compost, students practice following their topics of interest and have a better understanding of how they can use informational texts in their everyday lives. Reading about health and wellness, plant parts, environmental awareness, composting and gardening helps children understand the philosophy behind a well rounded life and be more open-minded toward different foods, ideas, and perspectives. When the library promotes process and inquisitiveness—both components of lifelong learning—children witness firsthand the steps in creating their own knowledge base.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMING**

Historically, public libraries have been known as places patrons can explore many subjects and pursue new ideas. School libraries are no different. Innovative programming is vital to laying a foundation for rewarding and productive learning experiences for the school community. By cultivating alternative programs within the school library media setting, a wise educator will create gratifying, transformative, and enriching experiences. As former ALA president Barbara Stripling states, “Libraries change lives.” Those three little words could not be more powerful or ring more true. Gardening in the school library not only connects the curriculum, but more importantly changes children and promotes greater learning, inquisitiveness, academic and personal growth.

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