

## Hockanum’s Organic Garden Project

Hockanum Elementary 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in East Hartford under the supervision of Health and PE teacher, Mr. Bocchichio, created an Organic Gardening Club in 2003-04. The Club continued in 2005-06 with partial support from a **YES** mini-grant. The Club’s service-learning goals include learning and teaching about the health benefits of organic gardening in addition to the process and business of gardening. It is appropriate that the Hockanum organic vegetable garden is hosted on the site named for the Indian tribe that originally inhabited the region and farmed there organically for untold generations.

The students take great pride in the perpetuation of their project through the sale of their produce during a Saturday Farmer’s Market. To successfully develop their garden plan to sell their produce, the Organic Garden Club meets once a week during the school year and into the summer. The Club has grown from 3 to 15 members and work together to learn about organic gardening, plan the garden layout, purchase seed, care for the garden and develop their lessons to teach others about organic gardening.

Many of the student gardeners in the Club are also “Autistic Care Givers” a service-learning project that serves special-needs students at Hockanum under the supervision of Mrs. Singleton. When the gardening club sponsor, Mr. Bocchichio requested students to volunteer to create a community garden, students already engaged in service-learning stepped up to the challenge. They not only got to work immediately on planning the garden and ordering the seeds, they also worked tirelessly to recruit additional students to participate in the garden. That plan has evolved to include all the students in gym classes donating class time during the year to help with an aspect of the garden project.

As the Club has taken on the goal to teach others about organic gardening, students have had to study and understand why organic gardening is more beneficial to both people and the environment than traditional gardening methods. Students love giving their “Organic Gardening is Better” presentation and give tours of the garden any time they can find an audience.



Organic Garden Club members at the gate of their garden.



Organic garden club members at work (June 2006).

Service-learning is a powerful teaching method for engaging students in learning and the Hockanum Organic Garden Club has clearly demonstrated the power of learning through service. Students without any previous experience with growing produce are engaged, motivated and meeting the goal of real education to learn useful information that can be recalled and applied. These students have learned that its okay to ask questions, how to do research and most importantly, how to take initiative and accomplish something that makes their community a better place to live. Having the opportunity to complete a service-learning project is contributing to the leadership development, health knowledge, gardening and business skills for all the members of the Club.