

Environmental Learning Grant Brings Urban Garden to Life in Spokane

by Heidi Smith

The staff and students at PRIDE school had a vision: an urban garden at their downtown Spokane campus, with room for hydroponics, garden beds and outdoor-based learning. For years, it remained just that – a vision. Then they heard about the Environmental Literacy Grants available through OSPI. “We realized a grant like this could launch us into this idea that we haven’t had the funding to create,” says Paige Albrecht, Chief Operations Manager.

Until now, PRIDE’s environmental programs had experienced large gaps between outdoor experiences. The urban garden will allow for regular outdoor-based learning time for students and cross-curricular instructional opportunities for teachers.

“An on-campus learning space allows us to construct regular learning opportunities for collaboration between students in grades 6-12, allowing them to be both students and teachers. Our staff can utilize the space as a lab for watching their colleagues teach about cross-grade-level and cross-curricular concepts,” their application states.



Students from Advanced Construction and Farm to Table classes were involved in every aspect of the garden's design.

Students have been involved in designing the garden at every step. An Advanced Construction class planned the design elements, debating over which materials to use for the garden beds and where to place them.

A separate Farm to Table team did extensive research on soil health and companion planting to maximize the available space. “We’re trying to be very smart about the design of it,” Albrecht explains. “The kids have led the majority of that work and it’s been a very cool process. The teachers have done well with giving them freedom while also factoring in budget constraints.”



The PRIDE School is located in the heart of downtown Spokane, providing a welcome green space for students.

It's been a learning opportunity for both staff and students, she notes. "This is a pretty in-depth project. Teachers are learning that these kids don't necessarily come in with the knowledge of what's needed, so there is a lot of research and teamwork happening and they're seeing growth in the students' understanding."

The garden project aligns well with the school's overall strategic focus, which has increasingly moved toward outdoor learning, climate education and environmental sustainability education.

"We have an environmental education element in both of our buildings to keep that awareness at the forefront for our kids," Albrecht says. "Our school is in downtown Spokane, and teaching the importance of sustainability can be a bit hard when students are surrounded by buildings and don't get out of town much. The urban garden helps them learn how to be sustainable in a small space."

Both staff and students are appreciative of what the environmental learning grant has made possible. "We don't get a lot of additional funding, so when we do, we try to use it wisely," Albrecht maintains. "It isn't just about the grant, it's about the support we've received. We wouldn't be able to create this type of learning space for our kids without that additional funding. Our students are ecstatic."