

Palisades Schools Collaborate on Gardens

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Staff Writer

Math, English, science and...a K-12 gardening program? Yes, school gardens will be a part of an integrated curriculum at Palisades charter elementary, middle and high schools.

Educators took the first step at a daylong conference at the Paul Revere Middle School on April 6.

"Our goal is to devise a plan to manage our funding, materials, supplies, expertise and volunteers to more effectively sustain our school garden programs," said Canyon School teacher Susan Hamilburg. "This is the first step of what we hope will be a productive collaboration."

When the Palisades Charter Schools Foundation offered innovation grants this year to encourage cooperation between local public schools, Hamilburg received \$5,000 for her gardening proposal, which includes curriculum development and workshops.

Life Lab Communications and Outreach Director John Fisher was a featured speaker at the gar-

dening workshop.

"We're a nonprofit that supports school gardens and shares ideas from other schools across the nation," said Fisher, who noted that Life Lab and the UC Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems co-manage a two-acre garden classroom overlooking Monterey Bay.

After visiting Revere's garden Fisher said "This is incredible, I've never seen a facility like this on a school site. You don't feel like you're on a school campus."

Fisher noted that benefits of student school gardens include higher academic achievement, greater nutrition knowledge, better eating habits and increased agricultural and ecological literacy.

The hands-on learning crosses a wide array of subjects, including natural sciences, math, language arts (through journaling), visual arts (garden design and decoration) and nutrition.

In addition to Fisher, workshop speakers included Tracy Bartley, an LAUSD sustainable schoolyard ombudsman; Farmer's Market coordinator Melissa Farwell; and Kate Rhault

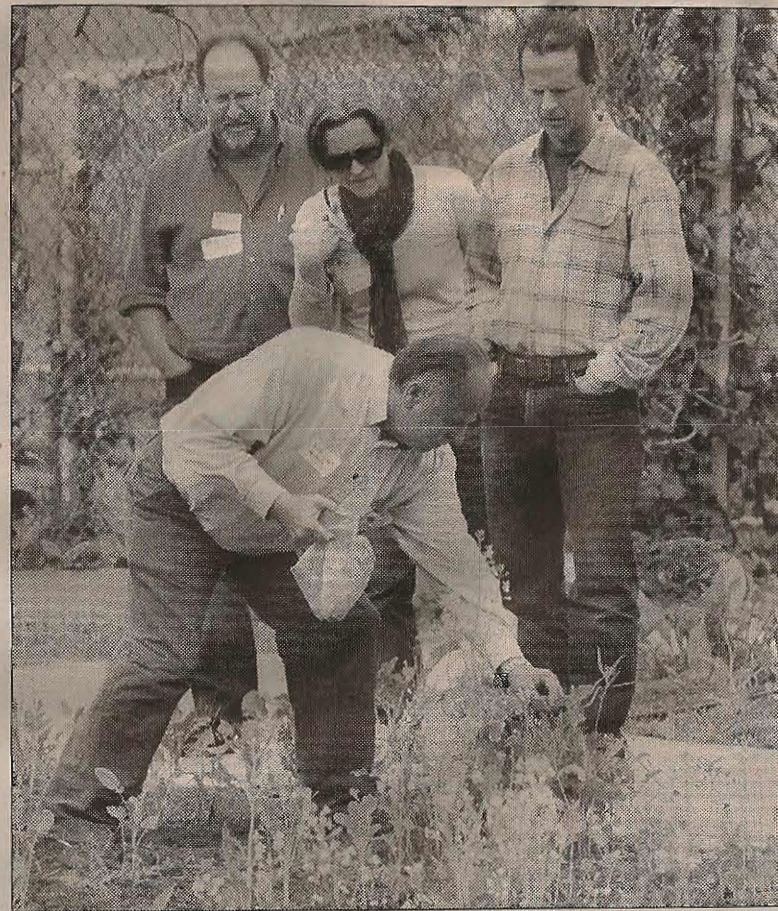
of the California Certified Farmers Market Delivers the Farm.

Palisades teachers were briefed on various studies, including 2003 research showing that California middle-school participants in a comprehensive garden-based instructional curriculum posted significant gains in overall GPA and math and science in particular.

"Students in 14 third-grade Indiana classrooms who participated in a Junior Master Gardener curriculum showed significant gains in knowledge in science, horticulture and the environment," stated another study conducted in 2005.

Sixth-grade students involved in a garden-based nutrition education program tracked in 2007 more than doubled their overall fruit and vegetable consumption. This type of curriculum also significantly improved students' attitudes about the environment, researchers found.

The teachers at the workshop, representing Palisades, Marquez, Canyon, Topanga and Kenter Elementaries, Revere and Palisades High School agreed about the benefits, but also sought solutions for common problems, such as the time needed to maintain a garden, which often can't be squeezed into class time. Ensuring that gardens are cared for over the summer, when schools



Paul Revere horticulture teacher Rick Herrera shows (left to right) Canyon teacher Doug Stoll, Kenter teacher Shari Laham and PaliHi teacher Steve Engelmann the school's raised vegetable beds.

Rich Schmitt/Staff Photographer

are not typically in session and campuses are closed, was another key concern.

A Web site is being developed and the next meeting will be in May at Canyon School.

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