



Grantee Highlight: School

Gaffney Elementary Composting

**Gaffney Elementary School/New Britain
ROOTS – New Britain, CT**

Organization Overview

Gaffney Elementary School, a school of 578 preK-5th grade students, has partnered with New Britain ROOTS to establish a composting program. The nonprofit New Britain ROOTS supports the diversity, empowerment, and education of the people who produce, farm, or eat food in its community of New Britain to promote food security. It provides educational programs in New Britain's school district and ROOTS has helped institute a garden club for 2nd and 3rd grade students at Gaffney Elementary, which was established with a new greenhouse and outdoor garden. This Garden Club provides hands-on education in gardening, nutrition, and sustainability and Gaffney Elementary and NB ROOTS expanded this to include a composting program with funds from RecycleCT.

How has RecycleCT helped?

With RecycleCT funding in 2017, Gaffney and New Britain ROOTS provided a base on which to build their composting initiative. This first section of the program included the purchasing of tools to educate students on composting and materials for composting the food scraps.



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Educational tools included 50 copies of *Compost Stew* and *The Children's Garden* which were used for the implementation of the program and now reside in the schools media center for use by any student or teacher in the future. In addition, they purchased 10 small food scrap containers, which teachers could sign out to put in their classrooms. A 125 gallon compost tumbler was also purchased to compost the food scraps from the participating classrooms. Five teachers volunteered to participate in the first year; participating teachers were provided with compost training, which included information on acceptable food scraps to collect in their classrooms, how to add food scraps into the tumbler, and composting activities for their students.

Gaffney Elementary also bought red wiggler worms and containers to develop small vermicomposting bins. These worms were a huge hit with the children at Gaffney, according to Joey Listro the executive director of NB ROOTS, the worms are "their favorite part of composting... [the worm bin] is the most impressive thing they've seen in a long time".

These worms helped with New Britain ROOTS' goal of increasing awareness of food waste and composting around the school. Teachers use the worms in interactive lessons to teach about decomposition, soil composition, and more.

Joey Listro says, "There's a lot to do with composting and it's interactive because the kids like worms. The food scrap containers placed in the classrooms provide the teachers with a fun, additional activity -- for example students get math practice when they weigh their food scraps and chart it on the board, and the students are held responsible for dumping the food scraps into the compost tumbler.

The Garden Club, which undertook all the composting efforts, is primarily 2nd and 3rd graders. Gaffney also has a Recycling Club of 4th and 5th graders. This project helped provide an in-depth training to both clubs from Gaffney's FoodCorps team in food waste and composting and it was these students who helped promote a school-wide campaign to educate the school community on food waste. This campaign consisted of a tutorial video of Garden Club members who did a walk-through of the garden and how to create compost. Each teacher who signed up for a food waste bin and each 2nd-5th grade teacher at Gaffney received the composting curriculum, which is also uploaded in the New Britain School District's

curriculum database for all New Britain teachers to access and use. Gaffney also hosts a summer school program that has taught an additional 40 first and second graders how to reduce food waste and make compost.

Future Plans

The composting program at Gaffney Elementary achieved great traction as the school years have passed, according to Joey Listro, "The biggest accomplishment is the sustainability of [the program]. Last year it did better than the first year, more teachers were interested... With every year we've built a little more foundation, so I think it has some staying power with the school." There are plans to replicate this program at other schools. Joey Listro continued, "There are 14 schools in New Britain and so if we can figure out how to get something to stick, like at this school, maybe it will also work at other schools."

Gaffney Elementary School is continuing with its composting



Joey Listro, Executive Director of New Britain ROOTS

program during the school years and throughout the summers, giving each student and teacher an opportunity to have a hands-on experience in composting and be an active participant in food waste reduction.

The RecycleCT Foundation, Inc. seeks to promote and support programs that educate Connecticut students or the public about waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting to increase these activities in the state.
<http://www.RecycleCT.com>