

Milford community gardens provide hands-on learning



Six gardens in Milford provide children with the opportunity for hands-on learning thanks to community/school partnerships. The Milford Readiness Teams provided the start-up funds. ([Photos](#))

At Kids Inc. and the Learning Center Inc. early childhood centers in Milford, children weed, water and harvest vegetables during the afterschool program. As they learn about gardening, they also are sampling the products of their work when the centers cook food items with the produce.

At **Milford School District's Morris Early Childhood Center**, children learn about earth and human activity through their community garden.

“It's a great opportunity to partner with local people and organizations in an effort to create a new experience for the children in our schools. They can see and be a part of the process of growing fruits and vegetables and get a better understanding for what it takes to transform something from the seed to the table,” said Jon LoBiondo, Morris' assistant principal.

In spring of 2015, the Milford Community Readiness Team partnered with the Division of Public Health's Milford Health Unit to fund the Milford Children's Community Gardens Project. The gardens unite teachers, students, parents and businesses to design learning gardens tailored to the needs of each partnering school or organization. The Milford Children's Community Gardens are located at six sites throughout the Milford community: **Benjamin Banneker Elementary**, Kids Inc., **Lulu Ross Elementary**, **Morris Early Childhood Center**, New Hope Recreation and Development Center and The Learning Center Inc. Each site creates unique experiences for children through the gardens.

Karen Long of the Milford Health Unit has played a key role in supporting the setup and ongoing support of the gardens. In October 2015, she partnered with the Food Bank of Delaware to provide a healthy cooking demo to families and children attending the family fall festival at Morris Early Childhood Center with a peanut-sweet potato stew and kale chips. Attendees also received information on diabetes, hypertension and the flu along with healthy recipes and a vegetable education activity to teach families about fall gardening, Cole crops, and to introduce them to the garden activities occurring at the school. This was just one of many education programs offered over the past year by the Milford Health Unit.

“School/community gardens enhance nutrition and physical activity and promote the role of public health in improving the quality of life,” Long said.

Spring planting will begin in May at each garden site. A planting event will be held at Morris Early Childhood Center on Saturday, May 7. Families will learn the importance of pot gardening and be able to take a plant home. The goal is to make children happier and healthier giving them a space to build skills and habits that last a lifetime.

The Milford Community Readiness Team provided the start-up funds for the gardens and community partners have joined to support the project. These community partners include: Blessings Blends, 84 Lumber, Growmark FS, farmer volunteer Chuck Hurd and Southern States.

“The Milford Community is fortunate to have support from businesses and organizations that are invested in supporting children's growth and education,” said Diane Frentzel, lead facilitator with the Delaware Readiness Teams.