



Winthrop Elementary Magnet School

Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

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Dear Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Michael Podeszwa, I am the Principal at Winthrop STEM Elementary Magnet School in New London, CT. I am writing to request your support for **HB 6621, specifically section 3 establishing a CT Grown for CT Kids grants program.**

The CT Grown for CT Kids strengthens the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care sites.

Funding from CT Grown for CT Kids can support food-insecure students with healthy, local food, educational experiences for students through STEM and nutrition curriculum, mental well-being of students by bolstering resilience, and providing social emotional support, and school districts as well as early childhood providers in cultivating relationships with local farmers to purchase, promote, and serve CT Grown food.

This program is important to me because Winthrop STEM Elementary School is a magnet school focused on STEM skills - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Children in grades K-5 from all Connecticut towns are eligible to attend. Our school is designed for students who enjoy challenges and investigating the world around them. Our STEM themes are designed to inspire students to imagine, investigate and invent. Students are immersed in authentic, real-world investigations that encourage their curiosity and motivate them to learn how the world works and how they can be the designers of that world.

Our partnership with Food Corps and Brigaid supports all our STEM skills and provides our young scholars with hands-on, fun, challenging learning with real world applications and ramifications.

We have our own greenhouse and garden beds where our young scientists learn and actively participate in our unique farm to table initiative. Winthrop students work along side adults while developing their own soil mixtures, planting seeds that are transferred to our gardens after sprouting, maintaining the garden, and finally harvesting herbs and vegetables used by our Brigaid Chef to prepare fresh, high quality lunches.

The most pressing obstacle to continuing our partnerships is funding. If we receive funding, our goal of educating our students on the benefits of community gardening and sustainable healthy habits.

COVID-19 has interrupted our program as funds were diverted to purchase required personal protection equipment, cleaning product, and individual supplies for all our students. Virtual learning has also challenged our ability to provide hands-on experiences and opportunities for our students to work alongside our community partners. Funding this program will allow us to continue these amazing learning opportunities for our students.

Thank you for the consideration and for your service.

Sincerely,



Michael Podeszwa
Waterford, CT