

**MONTEBELLO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

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**MUSD Students Promote Health at Farmers Market  
Event Featured Organic Produce from Student-Run School Gardens**

**MONTEBELLO** – Gardening for the 500 students across Montebello Unified School District is more than just an after-school project; it is movement intended to grow beyond the classroom and into the homes of the community. As a part of that effort, garden club students and advisors work together to assemble seasonal Farmers Markets to sell their harvests to neighbors, friends, fellow students and those who are interested in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

The first Farmers Market of the year was held at Bell Gardens Intermediate (BGI) on Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon. Participating schools included Garfield Elementary, Wilcox Elementary, Bell Gardens Elementary, Cesar Chavez Elementary, Suva Elementary, Winter Gardens Elementary, Bell Gardens Intermediate, Suva Intermediate, Macy Intermediate and Bell Gardens High.

"We started a school garden at BGI over 20 years ago, planting the seed of health as a way to combat the high rates of illness and disease prevalent here," MUSD Board member Lani Cupchoy said. "Education and nutrition go hand-in-hand, and I am beyond proud of all students who have committed to participate in the program and for their strong conviction for health in their community."

Students sold tomatoes, celery, sugar peas, onions and a variety leafy greens, fruits and herbs, as well as organic cleaning supplies. Profits from sales at the Farmers Market went directly back into the individual clubs to continue the its long-term success.

"I applaud my colleague on the board, Ms. Cupchoy, for supporting this cause for the benefit of our entire community," said MUSD Board of Education President David Vela. "This is a great way for our School District to invest in our students and families by not only encouraging them to make healthy choices, but also providing them with a great resource where they can purchase fresh, organic produce at an affordable price."

Students in the club are equipped with knowledge regarding nutritional food choices, water conservation, at-home gardening tips and are taught about ingredients and how

to read food labels. Additionally, students are able to take home whatever they plant and harvest during the school year.

Wilcox Elementary fourth-grader Nikki Mehl also found that the garden club allowed her to identify plants on a recent field trip to the San Juan Capistrano mission, while teaching her where vegetables come from.

"As educators, it's our priority to provide not only rigorous academic instruction, but also with educational opportunities that support their well-being and personal growth," said MUSD Superintendent of Education Susanna Contreras Smith. "We know that when students are eating right and making healthful choices, they feel better and are more prepared to learn in the classroom."

The District is also collaborating with program directors and advisors, as well as Nutrition Services, to possibly incorporate garden club items in school cafeterias.

"Our gardening clubs are really focused on education beyond the classroom," said Co-Director John Garza. "This program has not only brought nutritional awareness to our students, but has brought many school communities together in health, including their families."

The event also featured free health and wellness services by Family Health Care Centers of Greater Los Angeles, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services' Health and Nutrition Mobile Unit and Altamed. Compost recycling demonstrations were conducted by Athens Services and planting demonstrations were provided by Home Depot.

Entertainment was provided by DJ Andres Hortua, the BGE ICES Marching Band & Stomp and the BGI Generation Dance Team.

**Photo Captions:**

IMG\_2302: Students from the Garden Club at Suva Elementary prepare to make sales of their broccoli, potatoes and other harvests.

IMG\_2331: Students from BGI Intermediate, with Co-Director John Garza, show off their big smiles and large leafy greens.

IMG\_2334: Cesar Chavez Elementary School Green Thumb Club students team up to sell cilantro and other greens to a student peer.

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Montebello Unified School District is a dynamic learning institution employing top-quality educators. It is the combined work of many that allows the District to continue educating more than 30,000 students every year using the 40 Developmental Assets at all of our school sites. It is through everyone's efforts – students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators – that we are achieving the District's number one goal of raising student achievement. Learn more online at: [www.montebello.k12.ca.us](http://www.montebello.k12.ca.us).