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New Rochelle Fourth-Grader Grows Skills in Davis School Garden

NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y. (May 24, 2019) – Matthew Spoto weeded the garden at George M. Davis Jr. Elementary School just once last year before he got hooked.

"Then I kept doing it more and more and more," he said. "It's relaxing and fun, and you get to eat what you grow."

Now, the fourth-grader comes in at about 7:30 a.m., a half hour before his schoolmates show up, to get some extra time tending the plants.

"Rain or shine, it doesn't matter, he's out there," said Assistant Principal Laurie Marinaro. "Cold, too. He's there at the same time every day. He's an amazing kid."

Many students help out with raking, watering and weeding the cherry red tomatoes, cubanelle peppers, eggplants, flowers and more. But Spoto does more. He is the right-hand man to Bob Mandorano - Mr. M, to the students - a lunch monitor who is also the resident gardener.

When students help out during lunch, Mandorano doesn't even need to be there. Spoto can oversee his fellow students.

"I don't know what I would do without him," Mandorano said.

When Marinaro sees Spoto advising the other students - not ordering them, but guiding them - it's clear that flowers and vegetables are not the only things growing in the garden.

"Matthew is developing his own leadership style out there," she said. "He takes pride in teaching. He shares what he knows and brings it back to the classroom."

He was inspired by his grandfather's garden, and grandmother's cooking. While he enjoys a sugary snack, like any 9-year-old, the gardening has sharpened his appreciation for a flavorful vegetable, too.

"It's exciting to see," his mother, Rosa Spoto, said about the gardening. "It's something that he loves and enjoys so much. It's heartwarming."

About the City School District of New Rochelle

With nearly 11,000 students in 10 schools, the City School District of New Rochelle, through an active partnership amongst community, parents, staff and students, provides a high-quality and challenging education for every child, in a safe, nurturing environment that embraces rich diversity and drives success.

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