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St. Croix Montessori School Receives \$50,000 to Support Edible Schoolyard and Summer Grow Program

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St. Croix Montessori School was recently awarded the \$50,000 Sprint to Excellence Education Relief Grant from the St. Croix Foundation, according to a release the school issued Friday.

The funds will be used primarily to support the school's Edible Schoolyard and Summer Grow Program, which seeks to teach students about agriculture, healthy eating, and sustainability, both inside and outside the classroom. The program follows the teachings of Alice Waters, who founded the initial program in 1995 in California, the release stated.

St. Croix Montessori School said it first reached out to former Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture, Errol Chichester, who worked alongside Rattan Montessori parent, Jens Lawaetz, to

design a shade house appropriate for children ages 3 and up. Students and teachers then visited several local farms to learn about the agricultural industry and how to develop their own micro-farm. In late February, the school hosted a morning gardening event, where parents and guardians were excited to join students in planting the seeds that will soon become their “edible schoolyard”.

In addition to funding the construction of the shade house, the purchase of gardening materials and supplies, and providing for transportation, the grant also supports professional development for teachers and staff, the school said.

In April, St. Croix Montessori’s Director of Education, Jean Bishop, alongside VISTA volunteer, Mackenzie Heffernan, will attend the Growing School Gardens Summit in Colorado. There, they will learn from school garden experts about best practices for edible schoolyards, building sustainability, and promoting local agriculture as a practice and profession. In June, all staff will also participate in a virtual edible schoolyard training program.

St. Croix Montessori thanked the many supporters and volunteers who helped make the effort a reality, including: the St. Croix Foundation; Mackenzie Heffernan, who also secured a \$500 Sodexo Stop Hunger Foundation Youth Grant; Errol Chichester; Jens Lawaetz; Kimani Boyea, of Buddhoe Farms; Brian McCullough, of VI Hydroponics; Kurt Lewis, of Island Fresh Farm; Grantly Samuel, of GLG Plants and Produce; Yvette Browne, of Sejah Farms; Ms. Gibbs and Ms. White, of the St. Croix Science Teachers Association; and so many others

According to the release, a microeconomy is one of the hallmarks of Montessori education, equipping students with vital life skills from a young age. As Maria Montessori famously said, “the secret of good teaching is to regard the child's intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination.”