

2021 Gilda Allen Best School Garden Award

Learn more about this award and read past student essays [here](#).

- Runner Up K-5 Stoddert Elementary School [video](#)
- Runner Up St. Coletta of Greater Washington
- Winner K-5 Mundo Verde- JF Cook Campus Public Charter School [video](#)
- Winner 9-12 Friendship Public Charter School Collegiate Academy [video](#)

School Name: Stoddert Elementary School

Students Names: Ingrid, Nori, Mattie, Hugo, Tyler and Fenno

"We are provided with many opportunities to learn. This makes our garden program the best or at least one of the best. Each garden visit or class involves observing all the living things flowers, vegetables, trees, and bugs. It's ok to ask lots of questions in our class. Our teacher, Mr. Canada is very special. He says our Planet is one big garden and that we are caretakers of the land. I am one of five students on our Stoddert Garden Team who spends each Thursday afternoon running the Farmers Market and learning new garden skills. such as thinning seedlings or recycling soil from our raised beds and harvesting seeds from Zinnias. We have so much to be thankful for."

St. Coletta School of Greater Washington, D.C

Student's Names: Escher Amadio and Malakhi Parker - students representing Seniors Six class.

"I see a big tree and plants in the mud with staff and students by St. Coletta school trying to improve our school garden. I colored the picture of the big tree with green leaves and they put some plants in the dirt in Horticulture. These things are important because it promotes healthy eating in our school, connects students to the natural world, and teaches us about gardening. We learn teamwork and Working Together with our classmates."

(by Escher Amadio, accompanies drawing of students planting wild rice in the marshland of the Anacostia River)

"The flowers in the garden grows whenever it pours down raining, but for some reason when the flowers goes down they need water and sun."

(by Malakhi Parker, accompanies drawing of sunflowers going to seed)

School Name: Mundo Verde- JF Cook Public Charter School

Student Name: Ezra Gomez

"I think our school garden is the best in the district because it has so many plants and a lot of people help out in it. It has many plant families. I also think it's the best because it looks good and we can harvest them to cook things. There's a lot of rules too so the people and plants will

be safe. Here's some of the norms: move slowly, do your best, use ESPICA, ask before you harvest. That is why I feel safe in the garden. and I think it's the best because every grade gets to use it and before COVID-19 we got to use the plants to cook. Some of the food we made is pizza and kale chips. They tasted very good. This year we pulled out the monster Turnip. It was very big. We even got to eat it! The burnt ones were better than the others. Some of the plants in the garden are tomatoes, black nightshade, toothache plant, red maliber, fig tree, and carrots. I remember one year we planted seeds in the garden. I don't remember where they are though."

Student Name: Ashley Vasquez Perez

"Our school garden is the best it lets you see the been and we have a house for them. I feel good in the garden and I feel happy. Everyone gets to learn because it is interesting to learn garden. My favorite is the toothache plant. I enjoyed the toothache plant."

Student Name: Elizabeth English

"I love my school garden its so much fun. We have so many different types of plants."

Student Name: Rowan Chretienberry

"Mundo Verde's garden is a safe place where students can explore, and find things in our garden. We learn about pollinators, food activists, and so much more! We eat the food from the garden and even sometimes make our own food (like Kale Chips and pizza etc). Over the years Ive been in the schools and all the teachers ive had Ms.Kiko is probably the best.

A few weeks ago me and class harvested a huge MONSTER TURNIP,and we were going to eat it but it was so flavorless so the kitchen prepared two turnips, a roasted one (which was my favorite) and a turnip stir fry. It was fun. Trying different foods and now I like turnips! Our School norms:ask before harvesting,ESPICA,do our best ,move slowly,and use materials safely."

"My favorite subject in our garden this year has been the pollinators unit when we hand pollinated. While I write here I realize that has a bunch of pros and cons. For example, our garden has many plants, food and things to explore about. And our garden can be noisy, but our school garden is the best. A bit about our garden is we have all sorts of plants and food. Like turnips, figs, flowers, carrots, beans, shall I go on? And do fun activities I feel in the Mundo Verde Garden very safe.This is why my school garden is the best"

Student Name: Alexandar Temidayo

"It is the best because it's what gives us food to eat in our school and because we can plant, harvest and compost everything we eat and don't eat. Things we got to do: we got to plant,we got to harvest, and we got to pick out a MONSTER TURNIP.We even got to eat it. It was delicioso. That is why our garden is the best in the district."

Student Name:Jacob Mendez Valdez

I think we have the best because we got Black Nightshades etc. We got tomatos,monster turinip that I think is the biggest turnip in the district. It's special because anything you name we got it like toothpick,mint,tomatoes squash,grape tomatoes,kale,etc. Our garden is big we got a lot of stuff and we got two big squash.

We can make pizza, smoothies,etc. With fruits and veggies.

Student Name: Miles Goetz

I think our garden is the best because the garden we have is open to kindergarten to 5th grade we have it for specials and we have it four times in one school week. Sometimes we have it on wednesdays because it's a short day for us we learn we learn about plant families, food justice, how the plants look and pollinators. We have lots of plants in our garden like kale, squash, honeysuckle, fig, nightshade, mint lots of pretty flowers, carrots, monster turnip, toothache and tomatoes. Our Teacher Ms. Kiko helps us learn all the amazing stuff. I think something unique is that I and my family helped build it when I was in 2nd grade with the other kids in this school.

Student Name: Cassidy Johnson

"I feel good when I come into my teacher's garden. It always smells good and the benches are sturdy. I like how my teacher makes the garden fun. I also like how there are stumps for when some people are doing things that they are not supposed to do. We get a lot of things done but sometimes, not all. My favorite topic was on pollinating where we were able to use q-tips to gather as much pollen as we could. Some of the q-tips were light yellow and some were dark yellow, but it was all pollen. This was really fun even though some people were breaking plants in the process. There was a monster turnip that each of us got to twist once, and we were able to hold and eat the monster turnip which was so so good. We voted on which turnip was best- stir fried or roasted- it was amazing! We have benches in the garden and I like how we have a variety of plants. Have you tried toothache? When we were younger we made a pizza and every last one of us put pineapples, veggies, and fruit on them. We were all proud of what we did. Eat healthy so you can get strong! -La fin the end, have a nice day!"

Student Name: Andres Otero

"The Mundo Verde garden is the best because everybody is welcome; teachers, students, and parents. The only rules are ESPICA, do our best, move slowly, ask before you harvest and use materials safely. The best thing I've ever tried was the monster turnip. The plants that are in the garden are all different. My favorite thing we learned about was pollination. That is why I think the Mundo Verde garden is the best!"

Student Name: Dechun Sneiderman

"My garden is the best because lots of people come to teach the parents and family members. One time, we all pulled out a monster turnip and the next day we ate it- everyone loved it. All the kids asked "why is this so good?" When I'm in the garden it feels like it is my calm spot and somewhere I can still learn too. We learn four times a week and my favorite thing that we learned about is pollination. My garden is unique because when we go, there is a lot of silence and if not, we're doing a project."

Student Name: Alex Siwotso Edwards

"I feel happy at Mundo Verde's garden because it's nice to be sitting on the bench with my friends outside. I also like doing scavenger hunts with my friends. My favorite topic is the different families of flowers. I've tasted mint, monster turnip, and honeysuckle and I've enjoyed it. What's unique about our garden is that some students give their plants to our garden so we can grow them. Our garden is the best in the district because it's always open for everyone. I have memories of making food together."

Student Name: Mateo Fabian

"Our school garden is filled with fruits and veggies. Delicious food that will make your mouth water. The garden smells like mint and honey. We learn a lot about the different food families

and their names like nightshades and many others. The taste of toothache plants is sour and salty, and it make my mouth numb.”

Student Name: DJ Davis

“Peaceful, joyful, and happy. The whole class when we think and try to understand the meaning of our great wonderful teacher. The most liked topic in our school garden is unit 3: plant families. Our class loved the monster turnip. A joke: ‘what do you find in a lost n found? A turnip.’ I remember when we planted tomatoes in our garden. Our garden can bring people together no matter what race you are. You are always invited to taste and see for yourself. The reason we should win is because we help the planet, and put our all into saving this planet because we love it.”

Student Name: Farrah McMillan

“I feel excited in the garden because I never know what to expect. My favorite topic was the pollinators and how they pollinate. My favorite thing that I’ve tasted was the roasted monster turnip that was made by the chef with olive oil, salt, and pepper. Something that’s unique about our garden has white boards and memories that have been created over the years. I think we all have the opportunity to learn but some people decide not to learn and that takes away from people which I think is very unfair. I think that you should at least interact with your food instead of wasting it. Meat factory workers are underpaid.”

Student Name: Carlos Gaitan-Benevides

“Our garden is the best in the district because it’s diverse, we encourage healthy eating, and we have a pollination garden. We also have one of the best teachers to teach us about these things. One reason that our school garden should win is that we encourage healthy eating with the food from the garden.”

Student Name: Arianah Montiel

I think our garden is the best because each lesson we learn more about the garden. We also do a lot of fun activities. Another reason why it is the best school garden is because we grow a lot of plants like zinnias, squash, and we even grow a fig tree. We even harvested a monster turnip as a class. We have learned about pollinators, plant families and food advocates. We have a compost bin where we dump our compost. We learned that pollinators aren’t only bees or bugs. We have hand pollinated and done a bunch of other fun activities. We also have honeysuckle, squash, flowers, tomatoes and kale. And our norms for when we are in the garden are ESPICA, do our best, move slowly, ask before you harvest, use materials safely. When we enter the garden we do butterfly promise. ESPICA means E: Empathy S: Speak your truth P: Perseverance I: Investigation C: Collaboration A: Appreciation. We have groups and in our groups we have one person in charge of norms. So when somebody in their group is not following it they remind them. We have assigned benches and the colors are green, purple, yellow, and orange. And that is why I think our school garden is the best.

Student Name: Willow Smythe

Everybody knows gardens are for growing food and flowers, but the Mundo Verde garden is different. Not only does it grow food and flowers it also grows opportunity and fun, it grows learning opportunities and community. When I walk into the Mundo Verde garden all my worries POOF just disappear. The colorful raised beds filled with dark rich soil are not just garden beds there the homes of the plants everyone loves. As you walk through the arch covered in gourds and into the shady outdoor classroom all the nerves that school brings evaporate into thin air. The gardens are not only a safe place for the students, it’s a safe place for the plant and

pollinators that live there too. And when you bite into the wonderful fruits and vegetables they taste even better because you know you helped grow them.

Ok, I know you're wondering but how is it educational, and that's what I'm gonna tell you right now. In the middle of the garden is four wooden poles that hold up a beige sheet almost, that gives shade and under that beige sheet is four wooden benches, a whiteboard, and a wooden board with the garden norms printed on it. Lots of grades through the school learn different subjects such as the seed process, how to grow a healthy plant, plant families, pollinators, food justice, and more. But we're not just sitting there the whole time, we get to do scavenger hunts, drawings, challenges, games, and sometimes we get to dissect the plants or berries. I know since I mentioned garden norms you want to know what they are so here they are: DO your best, practice ESPICA, move slowly, ask before you harvest, and use materials safely.

I have tons of memories in the garden and here are a few of them: I helped harvest the monster turnip, I helped at the garden market, we cook things with the ingredients and plants in our garden, and I helped take care of the chickens our school had, and much more.

These are a few reasons why I love our garden, and the memories I have made there over the last six years, and when this school year is done I go to middle school I am going to miss it. And if my middle school has a school garden I doubt it will be as special as this one. This is why I think our garden is the best in the district.

Student Name: Santiago Fernandez Moix

Have you ever thought about what you can grow in a garden? Did you know that some schools have school gardens that kids can learn from? Some kids are lucky enough to be able to learn about different plants and foods by being in a garden. The kids at Mundo Verde Public Charter School are some of these kids. The garden at our school is a garden welcome to all that are interested in it. This garden grows fruits, vegetables, and many other foods and plants. We students at Mundo Verde had the chance to learn about pollinators, plant families, food justice, and many more different things. Some of the pollinators we learned about were: flies, bees, hummingbirds, bats, mice, moths, lizards, and many, many more animals. We also learned that there are accidental pollinators that pollinate only sometimes accidentally. We learned about legumes, nightshades, cucurbits, and brassicas, all different kinds of plant families. We also learned that food justice is the belief that everyone should be able to access healthy food. We learned all of this with the help of our cooking and gardening teacher and our lovely garden.

We get to learn new things about foods and plants almost everyday by going to the garden. I have been going to the Mundo Verde garden since I was three years old. I am ten now, and have learned so many things over the years while having fun! I feel like I am going to still learn much more and have even more fun. Our school name even means green world, which proves we care about our garden and environment. My mom always says that cooking and gardening is a very important class even though I prefer physical education. Our cooking and gardening class lets us see, feel, and experience a place of magic and beauty.

We harvested a monster turnip as a class and we have a photo of that amazing memory. We enjoy the garden, from the fig trees, to the zinnias to the cherry tomatoes, and all the way to the squash plants. Our school garden is very special because our school really tries to focus on making sure the kids learn and enjoy the garden. We students also get to help make sure the garden grows, reproduces, and survives. There is not one student, teacher, or genuine human being who does not know about our school garden.

When you enter our garden, you can tell it is treated well, but you can also tell that there is joy, life, and calmness following the breeze. In this cooking and gardening class we made salads, pizza, couscous, and more. I hope I will make more dishes in my last year at this school and garden. Let me say one last time that this school garden is a brilliant, amazing, outstanding, magnificent, crazy awesome school garden. I know you probably hear this from all the kids writing essays, but I really do think our school garden should win this contest. Long live our school garden.

Student Name: Faith Smith

Here's why I think my school garden should win. I feel like my school garden is very unique with their garden and it's kinda like a hang out spot if you think of it. Benches near the entrance so you can take a closer look at some of the plants and there's a shade area too that also has benches and you can still see the plants! There's a squash plant the grows on vines too and they made it one of the entrances to the shady area , that's my favorite entrance! You may also be wondering "who is they"? Well when I mean they I mean our gardeners Ms. Kiko and Ms. Carissa. They both helped make our school garden a thing! Fun fact! Did you know we have labels on the plant beds so you know which plants are which? One of my school gardeners Ms. Carissa told us a story about a butterfly so founds or well a Monarch butterfly. My. Carissa saw a butterfly hanging on a tomato like a bat! One of the rarest sights you can see if you ask me! Ms. Carissa found out the poor butterfly couldn't fly so she took it in, named it Sebastian and taught it how to fly for as long as she could before she let it go because fun fact: Monarch butterflies don't live for that long.

That shows how thoughtful and caring our school gardeners can be! I had so many memories and good times in my school garden and I hope others have some too! If I don't win I would like to see congratulations to classmates or random person I bet you worked hard!

Student name: Oscar Olson

Hi, my name is Oscar and I am here to tell you why my school's garden is the best in the district. When I walk into the Mundo Verde garden I feel free I love to see the beautiful and tall flowers all around me I remember the time when I was a little kid and I got to plant some seeds in the garden. In a week we could see the beautiful plants we planted. A lot of the food in the garden goes to the kitchen so we can eat it. In one of our meals our garden has five norms so everybody can be safe and respectful in the garden- be safe with materials, ask to harvest, move slowly, and practice ESPICA. I love how we get to learn about plants in our garden. we ate a monster turnip that we picked out of the garden and it was so good. We have a lot of food in our garden such as carrots, broccoli, tomatoes, and more. What I think is cool about our garden is that all the food in our garden is healthy and some of it we actually eat for our meals. We also do something called the butterfly promise and that is a promise that we will follow the garden norms and that is all the information I have about why my school garden is the best in the district.

Student Name: Jodha Borse

I think that my school garden is the best because my whole school from kindergarten to 5th grade gets to learn and interact in the school garden. My class goes to the garden every day. Every month we switch topics from pollination to food families to food justice. I love my school garden because we get to plant seeds and water and transfer plants. My favorite thing to do in the garden is try all the fruits and vegetables in the garden. Once we tried the toothache plant which was originated from Brazil. I brought some toothache plant home to my mom dad and

brother. That is another thing I love about my school garden that I get to share it with the rest of my family (if we are allowed to harvest it). My school garden has a variety of different types of plants from squash to tomatoes two black nightshade which Europeans have a bad history with. We sometimes get to have plants from the garden cooked for example once my whole class pulled a monster turn up out of the ground and the chefs at our school cooked it for lunch. And the day after we got samples of the monster turn up in two different recipes. Yum! We then voted on which recipe everyone likes better. My garden is the best because we usually always do something different like we have done scavenger hunts and drawings of different plants. I drew beans and squash but everyone was allowed to pick their own vegetables to draw so not everyone drew the same thing. In my school garden teamwork is literally everywhere. In my school garden my thoughts and imagination roams freely. I love that when we are in the garden everyone is calm and follows ESPICA (empathy , speak your truth, perseverance, investigation, collaboration and appreciation). My school garden is home to joy and happiness my school garden is open 24/7. I learn a lot of things in my school garden for example did you know that mice are pollinators? I bet you didn't! I have been to a lot, I mean a lot of different gardens with my family and friends but my favorite is my school garden by a lot. My school garden is only beautiful by nature like the most beautiful arch in my garden is not the most beautiful because it has diamonds hanging from it it is beautiful because it has beans growing across it. And This is why my school garden is the best. It is just so fun to be there and enjoy all the nature around us I hope that you enjoyed my essay!

Friendship Public Charter School- Collegiate Academy

Student Name: Treasure Jenkins (9-12th)

I believe that the school garden is the best because it is grown by the students. Staff isn't just doing all the work and calling it a "School" Garden. The garden grows with the school by the school. Our garden improves everyday just like we do. We produce all fresh fruits and vegetables. It gives students the opportunity to learn about gardening and healthy eating. It gives students the opportunity to learn, what to grow and how to grow a fresh and healthy garden for themselves. It gives students a opportunity to learn and do something productive while being outside. It allows us as students to learn how to be good environmental stewards and take care of our earth. We enjoy learning and growing outdoors. Overall our garden is the "Best School Garden" because its apart of us. When we grow as citizens everyday it grows. When the fruits and vegetables blossom into there final state, we blossom into the world. That's why our school has the "Best School Garden".