



## *'Digging in the Dirt' – School Praises Potato Garden Success*



*Photographs by Jack Reynolds*

***I LIKE SPUDS: Homegrown potatoes (above) from the Ethel Jacobsen School's new garden are dressed up while (top) children and school staff celebrate a novel way to promote fitness.***

Students in the Long Beach Island School District formed what may have been the world's largest hot potato circle in the gymnasium recently to celebrate their first harvest of the Ethel Jacobsen School Garden in Surf City.

The school was awarded a Healthy Community Development grant titled "Digging in the Dirt." Students in kindergarten through third-grade planted potatoes last spring, launching the two-part grant received through the N.J. Department of Health and Senior Services, Office of Nutrition and Fitness. It provided \$10,000 for the garden and two fitness clusters.

"We are completely thrilled about this project," said Bianca Aniski, the school nurse and a garden committee member.

"It all started with an idea, and through a group effort came together," said Aniski.

Parents and local business owners Kevin and Lara Sparks cooked up the garden bounty. The students indulged in a potato tasting after a lively group game of hot potato.

Eight raised beds were planted with red, white and blue potatoes. "Potatoes are kid friendly – low maintenance and mature in September," said Aniski. "We are looking for good, organic garlic to plant over the winter."

Future plans for the garden include teacher-selected plantings and using it as an outdoor classroom. "We have ideas of salsa and pizza gardens so far," said Aniski.

One bed will be universal wheelchair accessible.

The garden project has initiated the beginning of a sustainable, edible garden as an awareness of increased fruit and vegetable consumption.

Plant-based education is cross curricular and can easily be utilized in nutrition, science, mathematics, language arts, social studies, physical education, art and music.

"My goal is for the kids to develop a lifelong love of physical activity and an understanding of why it's so good for the whole body, including the brain," said Linda Kelley, the school's physical education teacher.

Local partnerships for the project include local businesses, families and municipalities. A link through the school web site ([lbischools.org](http://lbischools.org)) yields an interactive web site, [digginginthedirt.org](http://digginginthedirt.org).

The Ethel Jacobsen School was one of five

schools in the state to be awarded a grant for a garden, said Aniski. Shaping NJ is the state partnership for a nutrition, physical activity and obesity program focusing on environmental and policy change around obesity and chronic disease prevention. The project is also aligned nationally with the Let's Move program started by First Lady Michelle Obama.

"This will be a great chance for the kids to get connected to good food, nature and being healthy," said Aniski. "It is a great community project."

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