



Impact Report

Gretna Middle School

The Heartland Farm to School and Early Care and Education (ECE) Institute was established to strengthen local food purchasing and education practices within interdisciplinary school teams. Nine ECE teams from Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska were competitively selected to participate in the Institute during the 2024-25 school year, engaging in training, technical assistance, and coaching support.

The Institute is modeled after the "3 C's" approach, pioneered by Vermont FEED, which integrates the Classroom, Cafeteria, and Community into the development of farm to school action plans. Nebraska teams were granted \$3,000 in funds to assist in advancing their Farm to School goals.

Gretna Middle School in Gretna, NE is a public school dedicated to education and outreach. They provide education services to nearly 800 students, in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.

Farm to School Goals

- Composting and reducing waste
- Building a long lasting/sustainable garden
- Strengthening partnerships for long lasting impacts
- Fostering the community of Farm to School for all teachers
- Understanding our impacts on locally sourced foods
- Incorporating Taste Tests
- Cooking and curriculum

Team Members:

Renee Cornett - Food and Nutrition Services Operation Manager
April Vieth - 8th Grade Reading Teacher
Tara Brooking - Purchasing Manager
Brenden Burke - World Language French and Spanish Teacher

Coach:

Gary Fehr, Green School Farms

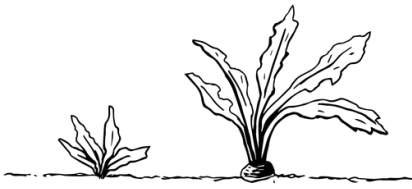



**Classroom
Cafeteria
Community**



The Heartland Farm to School & ECE Institute is offered in collaboration with Farm to School and ECE partners from Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. This initiative is formally led by the Kansas Department of Education, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Nebraska Department of Education.





Accomplishments



When Gretna Public Schools approaches Farm to School, they do so grounded in their core values: supporting local food systems, cultivating a community of learners, and providing hands-on, student-driven, place-based experiences. Guided by the “3 C’s”, Community, Classroom, and Cafeteria, the program brings these values to life each day.

Over the past year, Gretna Public Schools expanded food, farming, and nutrition education through engaging classroom lessons and hands-on experiences. Students launched an Agriculture Club, where they planted seeds and learned about gardening, while an outdoor learning space featuring raised garden beds provided new opportunities for experiential learning. The team also developed and delivered Academic Enrichment Period (AEP) lessons that reached approximately 600 students across the school. The Agriculture Club welcomed 10 student members representing multiple grade levels, and nearly 50 staff members supported Farm to School activities throughout the year.

In the cafeteria, the team made significant progress in sourcing local foods through a regional food hub and introducing locally grown products to students. Quarterly taste tests featuring items such as radishes, kale chips, and other locally sourced produce encouraged students to try new foods and expand their palates. The team also developed standardized taste-testing guidelines to support future events and found it rewarding to watch students enthusiastically explore new flavors.

Community partnerships were instrumental in the program's success. Collaborations with the Gretna Farmers Market, local farms, and UNL Extension helped establish and strengthen the school garden. Community partners helped provide materials, such as soil, at a significant discount, while the district grounds crew supported the project with site preparation and construction. These collective efforts created a vibrant outdoor learning space that will benefit students for years to come and fostered a strong sense of community pride and ownership.

With strong administrative support and an engaged network of community partners, Gretna Public Schools has built a solid foundation for continued growth. Looking ahead, the team plans to expand the school garden, increase student and community involvement, incorporate more garden-grown produce into cafeteria meals and taste tests, organize farm field trips for Agriculture Club members, strengthen partnerships with local businesses and families, and introduce composting activities to further enhance Farm to School learning.

