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# County Grant Serves As Seed Money For Vegetable Garden At East Quogue School



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**UPDATED** May 30, 2017 2:11 PM

**By Amanda Bernocco**

Vanessa Parsons is the first to admit that her thumbs are not the greenest, though that has never stopped her from toiling in the dirt with her three young children. Ms. Parsons, whose oldest, Emily, 6, began attending kindergarten last fall, explains that they, along with her younger set—Clara, 3, and William, 1—typically plant an assortment of herbs and berries outside their East Quogue home each spring.

But it was not until Emily began attending class at the East Quogue Elementary School this past September that Ms. Parsons, who owns Living Art Aquariums in the hamlet with her husband, Matthew, decided to investigate whether there was enough interest to create an educational garden at the Central Avenue school, explaining that other nearby districts—such as Hampton Bays and Tuckahoe—already feature similar vegetable gardens that are planted, and maintained, by students.

"I know that gardening is very big out here on the East End and I know other schools had them," Ms. Parsons said during a recent interview. "I thought it would be good if we had one, too."

It turns out there was interest, at least from East Quogue School Superintendent Robert Long, but one obstacle stood in the way: funding.

The two continued to kick around the garden idea, as well as potential ways to fund it, for several months until learning in January about a grant opportunity through the Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District. In less than two weeks, Ms. Parsons and Mr. Long typed up a proposal and secured more than 20 letters of support from community members, all of whom agreed that it was time for East Quogue Elementary to have its own community garden.

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The duo recently learned that their school was one of only three in all of Suffolk County to secure a grant, receiving \$1,700 of the \$3,000 total available from the county district. The funding will be seed money for their vegetable garden.

"We were so excited," Ms. Parsons said on Friday, as she recalled the moment she learned East Quogue was receiving the \$1,700 grant. "It was like, 'This is really happening,' and we were very appreciative. It's really helping move things forward more quickly."

School officials intend to break ground on the new garden, which will be located near the school playground, at the end of June, though the actual planting will not begin until students return in the fall. Though no final decisions have been made yet, the garden will likely feature an assortment of different vegetables that will be grown in seven to nine slightly raised beds, depending on the season, according to Mr. Long.

Mr. Long said the grant will cover the cost of purchasing the required tools and soil, and building the garden beds. Once the garden is established, the district will likely rely on donations to buy seeds and keep the plants watered, he added.

The superintendent said they intend to plant the garden near the front of the school, explaining that the area gets plenty of natural sunlight and is far enough away as to not interfere with recess.

"The kids don't go over there," Mr. Long said. "It's a nice big area where we can fit seven to nine beds and deer fencing."

He emphasized that the garden beds, while raised, will still be low enough so they can be easily accessed by the district's youngest students. "The little guys have to be able to reach in there and get their hands dirty," Mr. Long said.

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Congratulations! Many thanks to Vanessa Parsons for her advocacy and to Mr. Long for always being open to new, beneficial ideas.

By [Earthgirl \(49\)](#), Southampton on Jun 2, 17 12:03 AM

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