

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Community Spotlight

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- Full page write-up on your business in Pittsburgh Parent Magazine.
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- Article title included on Contents page of magazine under: *Community Spotlight*.

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- Article within PittsburghParent.com.
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Guidelines:

- **EXCLUSIVITY - 1 per category per month**
- Written by client & designed by Pittsburgh Parent
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COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT
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Sustainability education and outdoor learning come alive at Shady Side Academy through the school's unique SSA Farm program. The SSA Farm includes garden plots on all four Shady Side campuses that are planted, tended and harvested in part by students, and three of the gardens also have egg-laying hens. Together, the four gardens yield more than 600 pounds of fresh organic produce per year, which is sold at the weekly on-campus Fox Chapel Farmers Market and used by the SSA dining halls – literally bringing the farm-to-table concept right to students' lunch trays.

The SSA Farm was born in May 2012, when a team of volunteers first planted a 40x100-foot garden on the far fields of the Senior School campus with the idea of providing hands-on, experiential learning opportunities for students. That fall, the Senior School introduced a PE Farm class, giving students physical education credit for working on the farm. In spring 2013, the farm initiative expanded to include raised garden beds on the Junior and Middle School campuses. When Country Day School in Fox Chapel became SSA's newest campus in 2017, its U-shaped raised garden bed was brought under the SSA Farm umbrella as well.

Experienced farm educator Gianna Fazoli is the full-time director of SSA Farms, a position that includes overseeing the campus gardens and the Fox Chapel Farmers Market, held on the Senior School campus on Wednesdays from June through October. In addition, Fazoli works closely with the Shady Side faculty to develop and expand the farm's interdisciplinary curriculum in PK-12 classrooms across all four campuses.

"My goal is to encourage students to think expansively and build their own knowledge through constructivist, hands-on learning opportunities," Fazoli says.

At the Junior School in Point Breeze, PK-5 students help to care for the garden and its chickens during recess, while science classes study the plant life cycle, beneficial insects, animal biology, nutrient cycling and taking food from seed to plate. Older students learn about scientific experimentation by designing and conducting seed experiments to test independent and dependent variables of plant growth. Fazoli gives pre-kindergartners a weekly cooking lesson using an item from the garden corresponding to their "Letter of the Week."

At Country Day School in Fox Chapel, PK-5 students begin seedlings in the science lab, plant them in the garden and harvest vegetables for making soup, salads and salsa. Through exploration, they learn about soil and composting, and insects and their connections to the web of life. Students also visit the nearby Senior School farm, observing how bees aid in pollination, and how chickens provide nutrients and control insects.

At the Middle School, students in grades 6-8 can choose farm as their athletic/activity option in the spring or join the fall Harvest Committee to help care for the garden and its chickens. In science classes, students study the role of decomposers and pollinators in our food system through demonstrations in vermicomposting, learn about sustainable growing practices, and explore the native pollinator garden.

At the Senior School (grades 9-12), environmental science students do soil testing and examine mycology and the effects mushrooms have on bioremediation and human health. Health courses utilize fresh farm produce in the nutrition unit, learning about things like nutrient density and food access. Economics classes study sustainable agriculture business practices, farm-to-school product sourcing and food waste management.

Approximately 15 Senior School students work on the farm with Fazoli each fall and spring through the PE Farm course, planting, mulching, weeding and harvesting on Tuesdays and Thursday afternoons. About 10 students work as summer farm interns, tending the garden and chickens and selling produce at the farmers market.

Senior School students also can apply to be managers of the Fox Chapel Farmers Market, where they learn valuable management, marketing and community relations skills while working directly with local farmers and artisans. "It really helps the students hone their leadership skills and teaches them valuable lessons about the rewards and challenges of operating a small business," says Fazoli.

To learn more about the SSA Farm, visit ShadySideAcademy.org/SSAFarm

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