

Highland Composting Update

Sue Sullivan - Highland Kindergarten Teacher
Kate Barrows - Highland Alum and Green Team Supporter

May 2025

The Why Behind the Composting Project

Some Highland staff members sought to eliminate the food waste that we as a school community create.

- In 2023-2024, unwanted/unopened food was donated to Master's Manna
 - **2,964 lbs collected in 23-24 school year**
- This school year, under the guidance of the cafeteria aides, unwanted/unopened perishables and non-perishables (breakfast and lunch) are collected. Highland's Social Worker then assembles bags to distribute to 8 Highland families who have expressed food insecurity.



Donation Cart for Non-Perishables and Perishables



What We Have Learned and Accomplished So Far

- Volunteers came during lunch waves 9/16-9/27 to help students learn to sort.
- Formed steering committee (Highland's Green Team) - 3 BOE members, parents, school staff; We met on the following dates: 9/24, 11/12, 1/28 (email), and 5/6
 - [2024-2025 Green Team Agendas and Minutes](#)
- Mrs. Sullivan went on morning meeting announcements to communicate roll out of composting program.
- Beginning of year - OT, girl and boy scouts ripped brown paper bags up.
- Invaluable partnership with our School Custodian, Steve Greenwood and Cafeteria Staff
- Paper bag (from breakfast program) recycling was implemented - carried to recycling dumpster.
- Currently collecting ~5 lbs of compostable material per day.



What We Have Learned and Setbacks So Far

- Volume of waste created is more than our commercial tumbler can handle.
- Compost takes longer to be ready than we anticipated
 - Cold weather decreases breakdown
 - Mr. Greenwood added "compost accelerator" to bin (purchased with grant funding) in May
- Not all cafeteria menu items (i.e., pizza, steak and cheese grinder) lend themselves to composting.
- Breakfast program changes (no longer free) decreased volume of food for donation.



We Used the Mansfield Middle School [Guide](#) to Successfully Implement Composting at Highland

- Find a champion to spearhead the program - Sue Sullivan
- Develop the program with a diverse committee that includes custodial staff, school administrators, teachers, parents, food service, public works staff - Highland Green Team
- Make the daily composting routine a staff duty that can be done in lieu of bus duty, detention and/or cafeteria duty - Emily Banach allowed school staff to leave at dismissal time if helped in sorting cafeteria waste at beginning of the school year.
- Enlist parent/child (family) help in turning the compost - Boy and Girl Scouts
- Publicize tangible success to the school community - in progress
- Research what is involved in a schoolwide composting operation
- Clearly define the scope of the project (it's okay to start small!)
- Follow the school system protocol for developing new programs - verified with school principal and school superintendent approved grant funding
- Get support from all components of the school community - shout out to Steve Greenwood, school custodian and Cafeteria Staff



Compost Bin - September 23

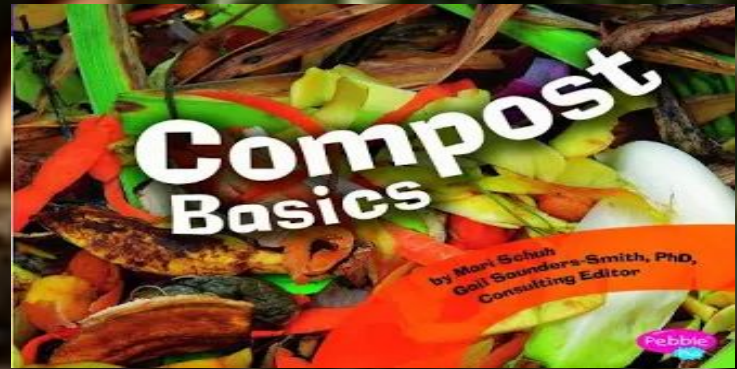
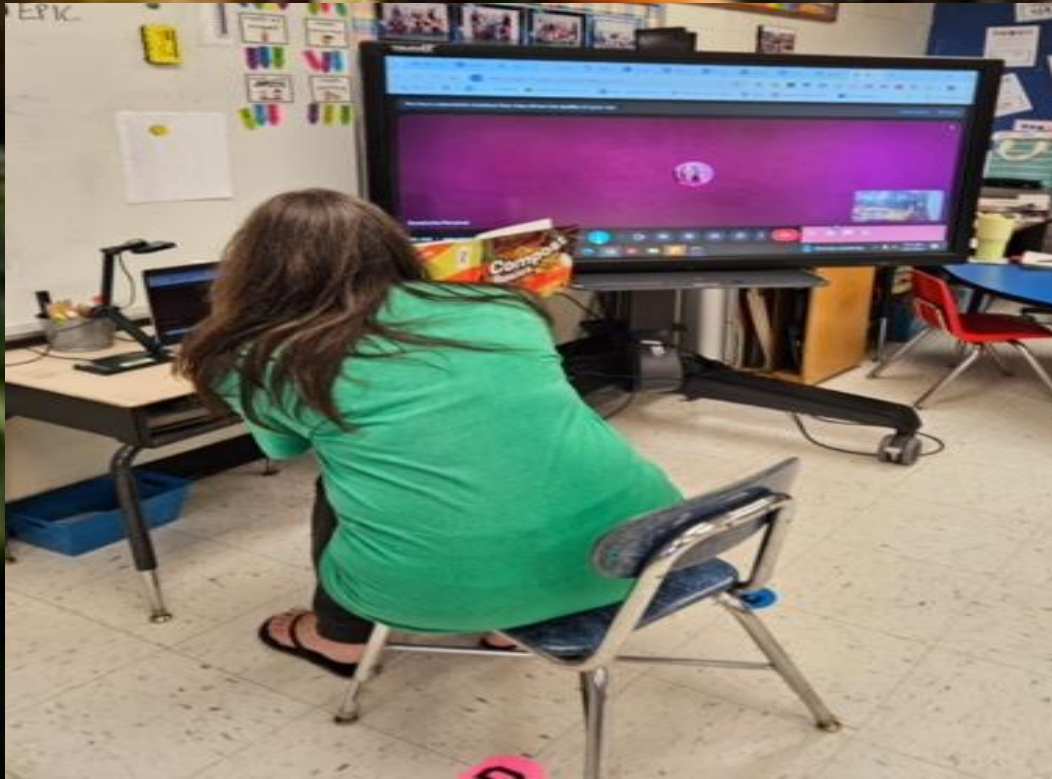
Composting in Action



Recycle Bin - yellow
Liquid Waste - white
Compost Bin - green
(purchased with
WEF Grant funding)



Mrs. Sullivan reads a book about
composting to Highland School on
Earth Day 2025



Compost Basics by Mari
Schuh

From Garbage to Compost by
Lisa Owings and Save the
Scraps by Bethany Stahl
were purchased with grant
money but these were
checked out (to students or
staff) at the time.

How Student Learning is Impacted

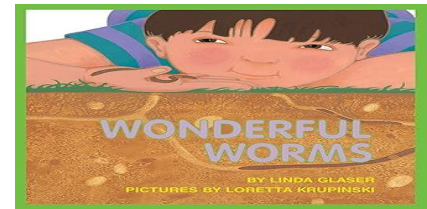
- Increasing awareness for youngest learners about food waste, sustainability, and altruism.
- Learning about composting in action through their experiences in the cafeteria or with their classroom teachers.
- Vocabulary words learned - perishable, nonperishable, decompose
- Learning sorting skills - perishable, nonperishable, liquids, compostable
- Small actions can have a BIG impact!

Supplementing Kindergarten Science Unit 3 - "Living Things"

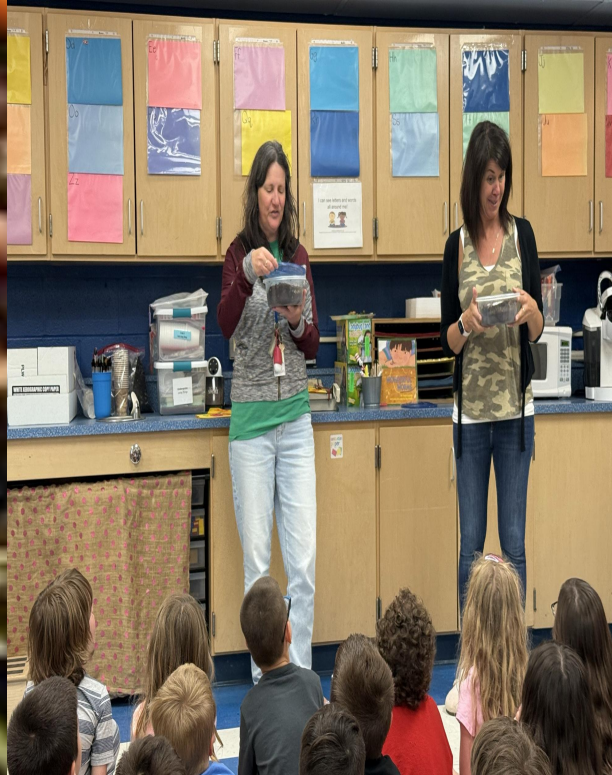
Student Objective - I can explain how (plants and) animals change their environment to survive.

ES.SC.4.1 Record information and create a prediction or examine results

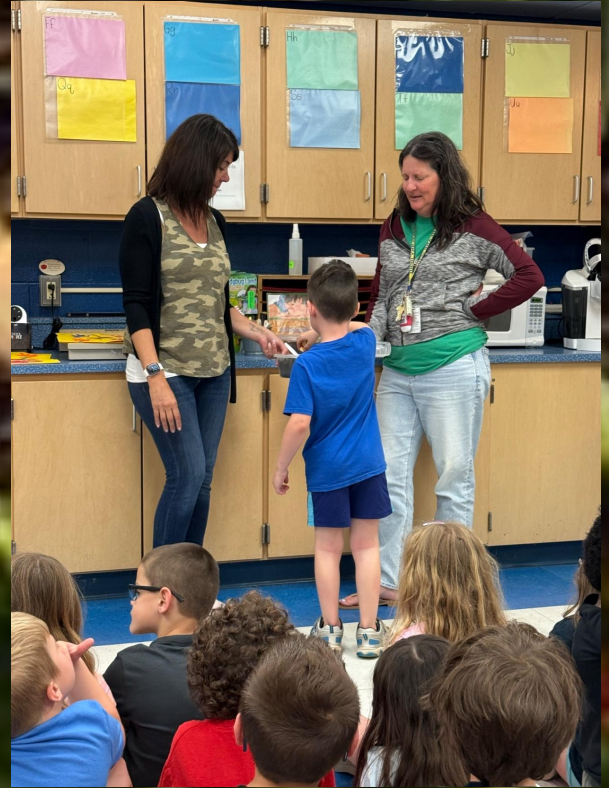
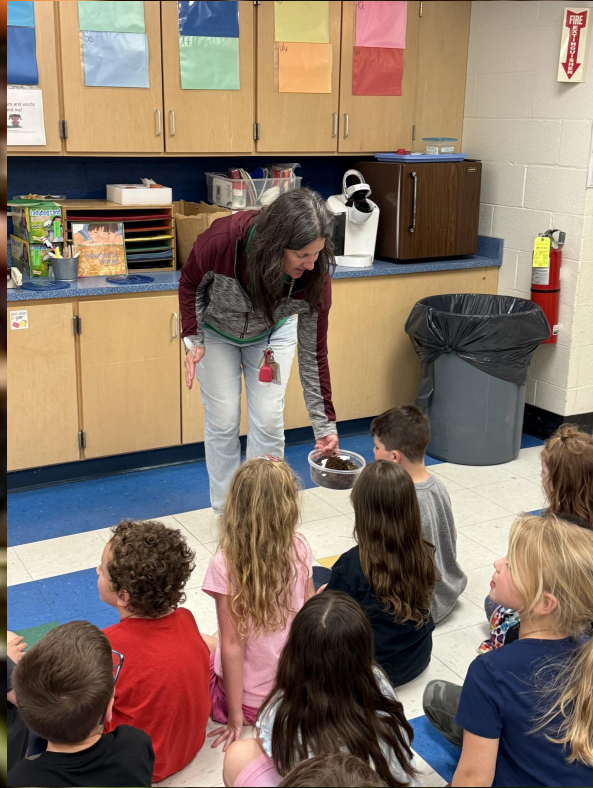
- Kindergarten teachers met with Dan Wostbrock (Science Curriculum Coordinator) during Grade Level meeting.
- Mrs. Sullivan shared composting update and asked other K teachers to add their worms/dirt/scraps to compost bin when done with their science lessons.
- Kindergarten students listened to Wonderful Worms by Linda Glaser and Carl and the Meaning of Life by Deborah Freedman.
- Added apple pieces (leftover from breakfast program), eggshells, coffee grounds, lettuce scraps to worm habitat/compost bin.



Ms. Colonese's and Mrs. Sullivan's Class Learn About the Important Role Which Worms Play in Soil



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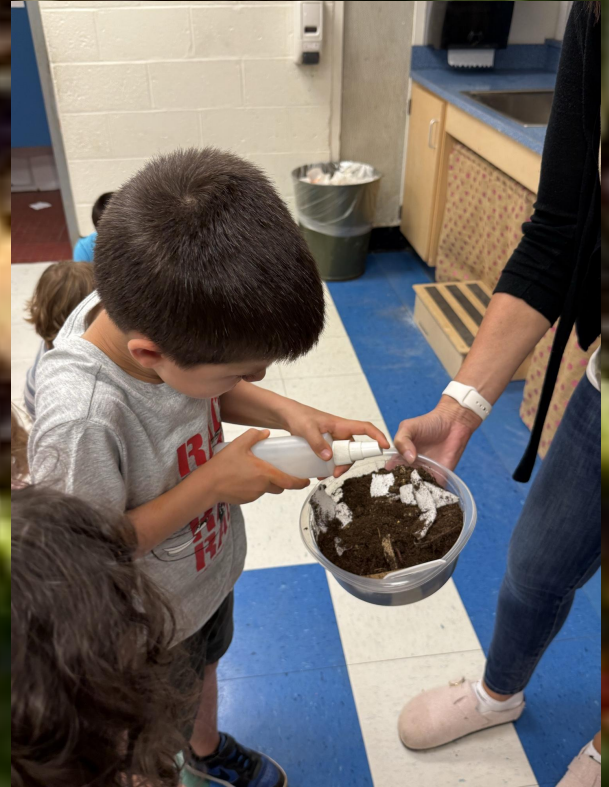
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Miss Marone's Class Visited the Composting Bin to Add Their Worms and Soil.....Can't Wait to See What Happens Next!

May 8, 2025



Mrs. Papoosha's Kindergarten Class Visited the Composting Bin to Add
Eggshells to the Compost Bin

May 9, 2025



Plans for Remaining School Year/Next Year

- Share program updates with Highland staff and families.
- Monitor the Compost Pile - Students measure and record the temperature of the compost pile each week. Use this information to determine the success of the pile and troubleshoot problems with the pile.
- Determine where compost is in "cooking" at the end of the year and distribute to Sheehan Environmental Action Club, Wallingford Garden Club, and Highland families
 - Send sample to Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station to test Ph level
- Consider putting 'cooking' compost in garbage bins to free up the tumbler.
- Continue to foster relationship with Sheehan Environmental Action Club.

THANK YOU WVEF

We are so happy to have begun this composting program at Highland Elementary School. We have learned so much from it and while there is still work to be done, we believe that we are on the right track to helping our students, our community and our Earth.

We appreciate your support and the grant funding which you offer to Wallingford teachers, staff and students!