



Press Release  
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## **Legislators, School Staff, and Advocates Gather to Celebrate Lowell's Expanding Farm to School Program**

Lowell, MA, Oct. 25, 2021 - On a rainy fall morning during Massachusetts Farm to School Month, Representative Vanna Howard and Senator Edward J. Kennedy came to tour STEM Academy and heard from Lowell Public School school nutrition staff, administrators, educators, and students about Lowell's expanding farm to school programs. The event was hosted in partnership with Massachusetts Farm to School, a statewide organization supporting schools to increase local food sourcing and education, Lowell Public Schools, and Mill City Grows, an urban food justice organization creating gardens, markets, and educational opportunities for Lowell residents.

At a time when schools are facing unprecedented challenges due to COVID-19, participants were eager to celebrate how the district has stepped up to serve students throughout the pandemic, and to recommit to their long term vision for the district's farm to school program. When school buildings closed in March 2020, they didn't miss a beat, quickly pivoting to ensure community food security and food-based educational resources to their students. They gave away over 2,500 pot, soil and seed curriculum kits for remote learning and provided over one million emergency meals to district families to date, many featuring locally grown fruits and vegetables. In July 2021, Lowell Public Schools was thrilled to be announced as one of only 8 Massachusetts recipients of the USDA Farm to School Grant, awarding just under \$100,000 towards the district's growing Farm to School initiative over the next two years. "It's really important for us to teach our children where our food comes from in order to set them up to be healthy eaters going forward," explained Alysia Spooner-Gomez, Lowell Public Schools Food Service Director.

"Lowell is an inspiring example for school districts in Massachusetts. They have a bold vision for providing their students with the highest quality, locally sourced meals and bringing classroom lessons to life through hands-on learning in the school garden. They are taking advantage of every opportunity to strengthen their program for their students," says Lisa Damon, Co-Director of Massachusetts Farm to School.

"Ensuring our students are provided with quality nutritious food is a big contributing factor to the health and well-being of our children in the Commonwealth. We are so grateful to the many incredible local organizations collaborating on this important cause," **said Representative Howard**, "providing our students and families with healthy, clean and sustainably-sourced food – from farm to school – one school at a time – is a big step forward to fostering food justice and equity in our Commonwealth."

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Founded in 2004, Massachusetts Farm to School has been at the forefront of the nationwide farm to school movement. Over 1/3 of the state's school districts provide access to healthy, local foods and spend an estimated \$11.4 million annually on Massachusetts produced food. For more information about Massachusetts Farm to School visit, [www.massfarmtoschool.org](http://www.massfarmtoschool.org). Photos available upon request.

Lowell Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services (LPSFNS) manages 28 schools that receive satellited daily meal delivery, serving approximately 19,000 meals per day across a breakfast, lunch, and dinner program. In 2015, Lowell Public Schools qualified for free breakfast and lunch through the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision and average year student participation is 78% for lunch and 60% for breakfast.

Founded in 2011, Mill City Grows' mission is to foster food justice in Lowell, MA by improving physical health, economic independence, and environmental sustainability through increased access to land, locally grown food, and education. Mill City Grows' School Garden Program, launched in 2013, brings gardening and nutrition education to more than 8,000 students each year through in-school, after school, and out-of-school curricula. As dynamic outdoor classrooms, school gardens encourage students to work together to seed, nurture, and grow fresh food, and experience the growing cycle of food from seed to plate.

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