

# CitySprouts June, 2025 Teacher Data

## *Survey and Focus Groups*

Summary .....	1
Teacher/Respondent Demographics.....	3
Motivations for Using CitySprouts Programming.....	5
CitySprouts’ Perceived Connection with the Curriculum.....	6
What Have Teachers Done with CitySprouts This Year? .....	10
Teacher Perceptions of the Student Impact of CitySprouts Programming .....	12
Satisfaction with the Garden Educator .....	15

### Summary

The results of the evaluators data collection from CitySprouts participating teachers at the end of the 2024-2025 school year indicate significant and broad teacher satisfaction with the program. Teachers call out the relevance of the program’s content to district science standards, the ease of working with highly skilled CitySprouts garden educators, and the overall joy that the program brings to most participating students. These findings are in line with those from over five previous years of the evaluators’ data collection work with Boston and Cambridge teachers.

The evaluators point to several contextualizing factors related to the data. First, the overall sample size of teachers who provided data is small. Only 25 teachers per district responded to the May/June online survey and only 10 teachers total (seven from BPS and three from CPS) came to one of the four offered focus groups. Discounting the fact that some teachers who responded to the survey also engaged in focus groups, the total data set for this evaluation was only 60 teachers. Since this sample was overwhelmingly positive about CitySprouts, it is necessary to consider the possibility that the population of teachers responsive to the evaluators’ data collection efforts was significantly skewed toward those volunteering teachers wishing to communicate positive perspectives to the evaluators.

Taking that as a caution, the data indicates that teacher respondents believe that CitySprouts programming supports their science standards and curriculum. Teachers indicate that science does not figure prominently in the topics that they are expected to focus upon in their PK – K classrooms. Rather, science is generally regarded as a topic of lesser importance relative to reading, literacy, and sometimes math. Science usually competes for whatever remaining instructional time is available. As such, teachers are very appreciative of whatever resources they have that can be afforded to science; and CitySprouts, as a long-recognized science resource, is welcome as something that fills what for many teachers would be a curricular void. Teachers in some schools and at some grade levels state that their students have access to school/district science specialists, although this seems largely the case with upper elementary grades and at any rate does not involve CitySprouts (the science specialists are said to teach their own curricula and do not coordinate with CitySprouts). The overall take seems to be that teachers feel that CitySprouts serves a very valuable purpose of providing exposure to science for those lower elementary students who might otherwise have no opportunity – and at any rate few resources – for science education.

As noted, teachers are quite appreciative of CitySprouts programming and are universally positive about their school’s garden educator (GE). GEs are said to work well with students and are extraordinarily flexible, communicative, and responsive to teacher needs. Several GEs are said to be bilingual, and this is something that is quite positive and desirable to teachers. Teachers in BPS are disappointed that the way that CitySprouts programming is situated in their district means that GEs are not able to work

independently with students without a teacher being present. Here, teachers believe that this limits that amount of time that GEs can spend with students and thereby reduces the effectiveness of the CitySprouts program. In both districts, teachers feel that it would be desirable for CitySprouts to be present in their schools for more than once a week. Lack of time with the GEs is the main concern among teachers in both districts. Teachers generally feel that once a week is not enough time for the GE to spend in each school, and this lack of time/contact is overwhelmingly credited as being the reason why some teachers are said to be reluctant to engage with CitySprouts at all.

For the most part, teachers in both districts are confident in their knowledge of relevant science curricula and their ability – should they so choose – to teach science to their students. And again, CitySprouts is seen by these teachers to be an important science learning resource.

Teachers consistently note that CitySprouts serves what many feel is a significantly more important purpose than its function as a science resource; and that is as a way to engage students in the outdoors and nature. Teachers state the calming effect that simply being outdoors affords to their students. Some teachers note that some of their students have little exposure to the outdoors and nature outside of that they have in the school garden. In a similar vein, teachers note that CitySprouts brings benefits to their special needs students in that garden activities are calming for these students and often represent activities that special needs students can participate in equally with their class peers.

Teachers identify time as the greatest barrier to participation in CitySprouts. This identification refers to time that they have during the school day to devote to CitySprouts as well as the time available from the GE to work with their classes. In terms of the former, BPS teachers state that their district's requirement that they must accompany students to the garden means that they have less opportunity to have garden time than would be the case if aides could accompany students and the GE. Like their peers in CPS, BPS teachers feel under tremendous pressure to meet curriculum time and learning standards and therefore find it difficult to identify garden time within the school day. This is given as a reason why program participation is largely limited to those teachers who are already convinced of the benefit that CitySprouts brings to their students and who therefore make time for the program. These issues of "time" work together – teachers have to find time and time is not plentiful given the one-day-per-week school schedule of the GE – to be a significant barrier to program participation.

Nevertheless, it is clear that for those teachers who do work with the program, CitySprouts is tremendously appreciated and little stands in the way of these teachers making use of the program and its resources. The evaluators find that CitySprouts participation is almost entirely driven by individual teacher desire to work with the program and these program-experienced teachers are clearly CitySprouts' greatest advocates and champions.

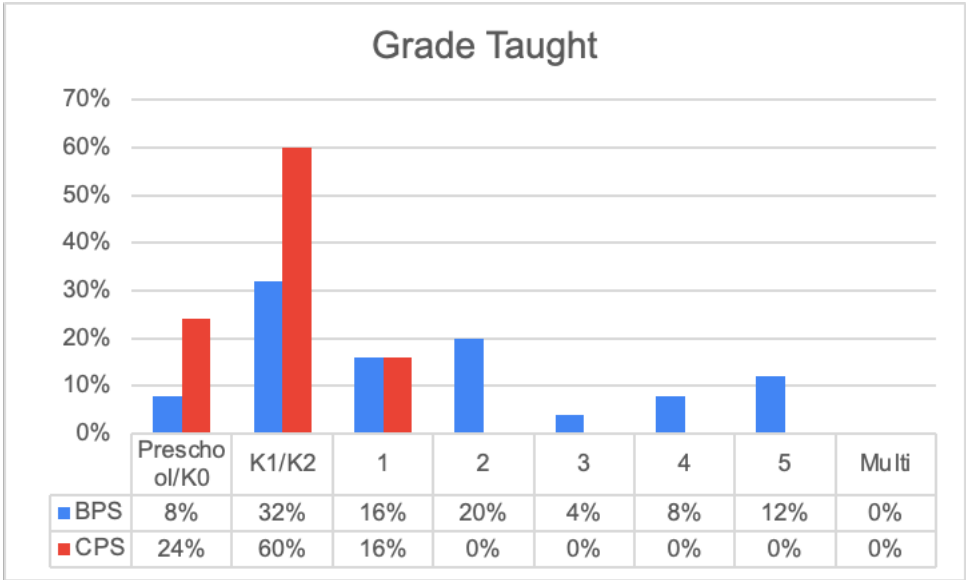
Formatting Note: Teacher quotes derived from the online survey are produced as bulleted text, non-italic. These quotes are verbatim with no editing aside from correction of spelling errors or removal of confidential information. Those redactions/substitutions are set out in [ ]. Teacher quotes from the focus groups are produced as bulleted text in an *italic* font. These quotes are presented from transcript and are only edited for brevity or relevance.

Teacher/Respondent Demographics

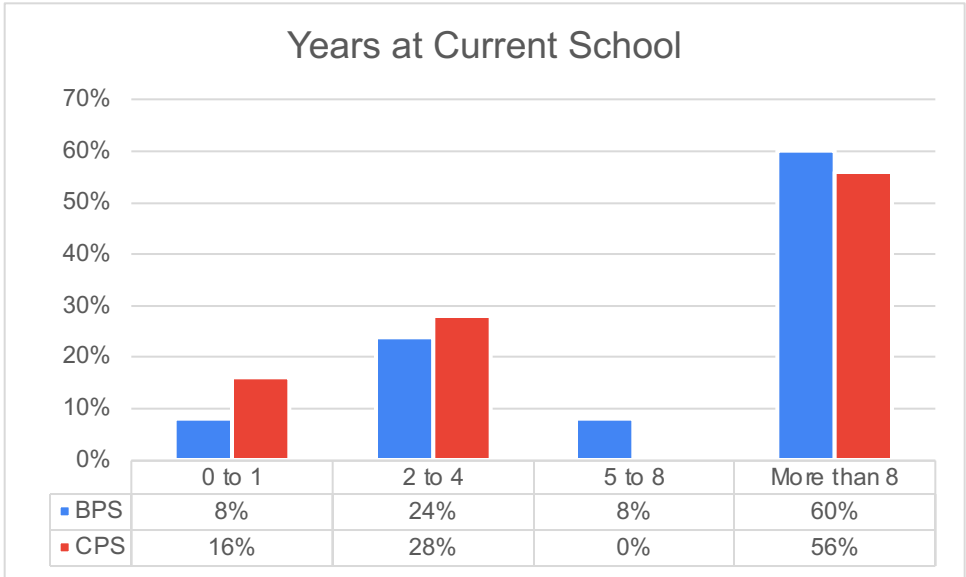
There were 50 survey responses total, with 25 coming from each district. Nine schools reported from BPS (all except Henderson Upper, Russell, and Haynes Early Childhood) and eight from CPS (all except Dr. MLK, Fletcher Maynard, Kennedy Longfellow, and Tobin).

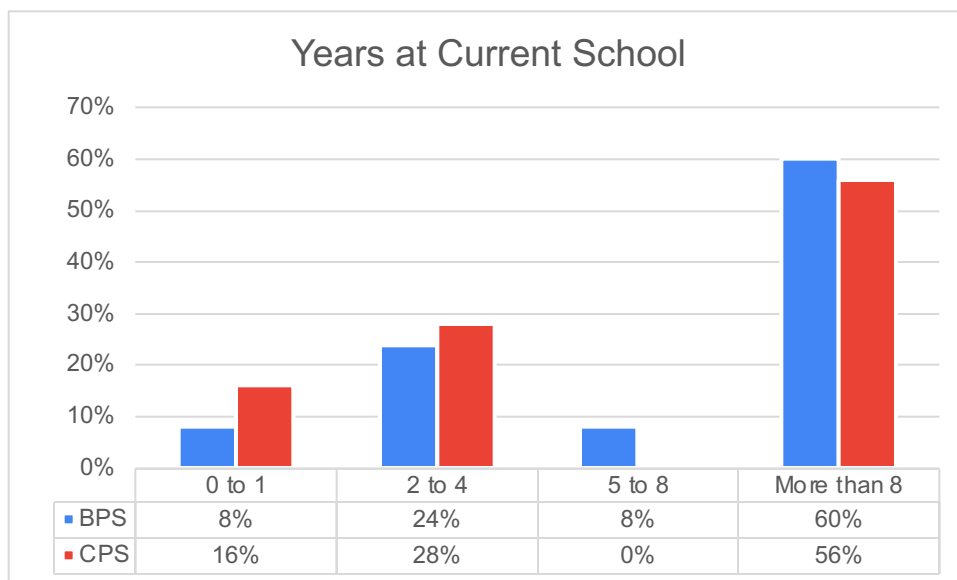
Focus groups consisted of 10 teachers total – seven from BPS and three from CPS. There were two BPS focus groups and one CPS group.

The majority of teachers responding to the survey across surveys and focus groups were Kindergarten or lower elementary. CPS produced a slightly more diverse grade span of teachers with survey respondents across the PK through 5 range (although the majority were PK – K). While BPS survey respondents were all PK – 1 (mostly K), BPS did produce several teachers in the focus groups from grades 1 – 3.



Survey Respondents – Grades Taught

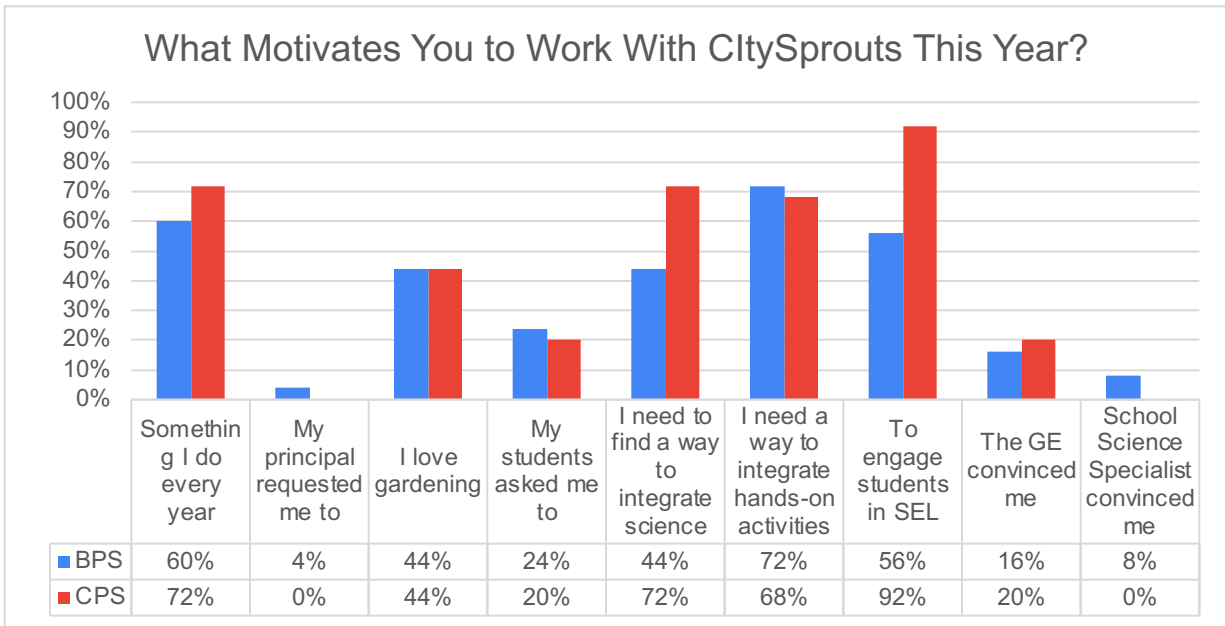




Survey respondents as well as focus group participants in both districts were typically teachers who had more than eight years of classroom experience and had been at their schools for more than eight years.

A number of teachers in the focus groups spoke of their lengthy exposure to CitySprouts, with several indicating that they have worked with the program for well more than a decade.

# Motivations for Using CitySprouts Programming



Survey respondents generally agreed that their use of CitySprouts stems from tradition (“It’s something I do every year”) and a desire to find ways to engage students in hands-on activities. Teachers in CPS are notable in their interest in finding a way to integrate science (28% more likely than in BPS) and also to engage in SEL (36% more likely than in BPS).

In focus groups, teachers were asked specifically about the degree to which their school administrator (Principal) might encourage their participation in CitySprouts. Across the board, in both districts, teachers indicated that administrator encouragement had no impact on their participation. Rather, teachers believe that CitySprouts is just available and if they want to sign up, they do so.

- *I don’t remember [the Principal] doing anything more than putting it out there. CitySprouts sent forms and we signed up. The garden educator just schedules. (BPS Teacher)*
- *We’re motivated because we want our children to have this experience. (BPS Teacher)*

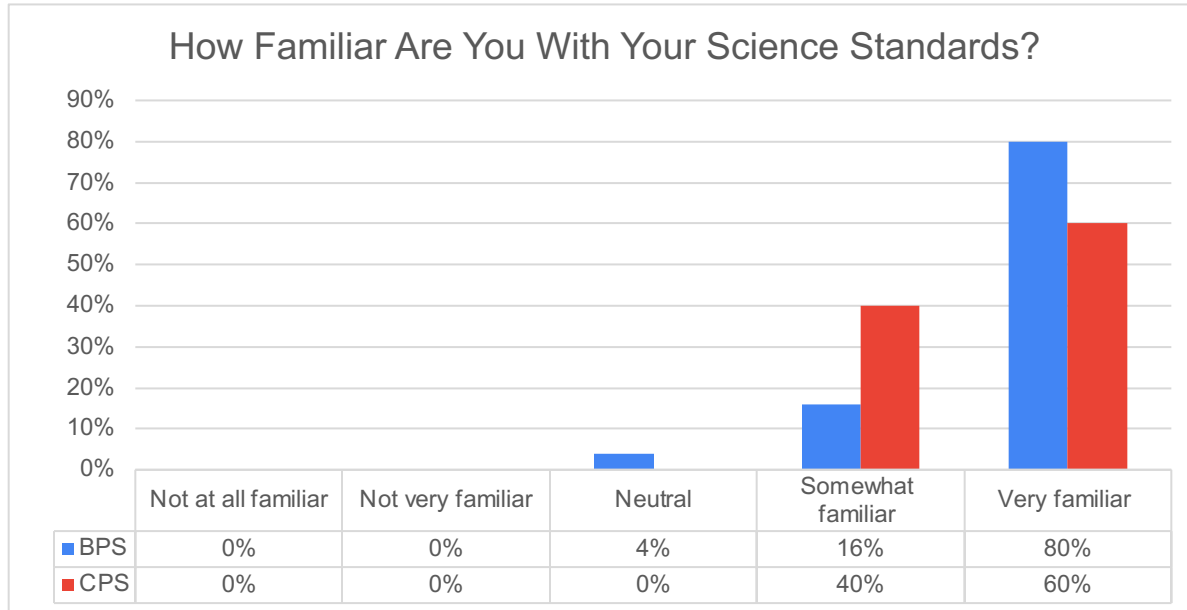
CPS teachers were more opinionated as to their comments about administrator encouragement or lack thereof:

- *It’s not discouraged at [my school], but not overtly encouraged. It’s like an add on. The priority is to get this many minutes of math or literacy or whatever. Teachers feel a lot of pressure about what they have to do. (CPS Teacher)*
- *I’ve never been to any [recent] gathering where CitySprouts was talked about. Our current admin does not encourage the CitySprouts garden. No email to encourage. But our past admin was a big supporter of CitySprouts. Back then 75 to 80% of the classrooms did it. (CPS Teacher)*

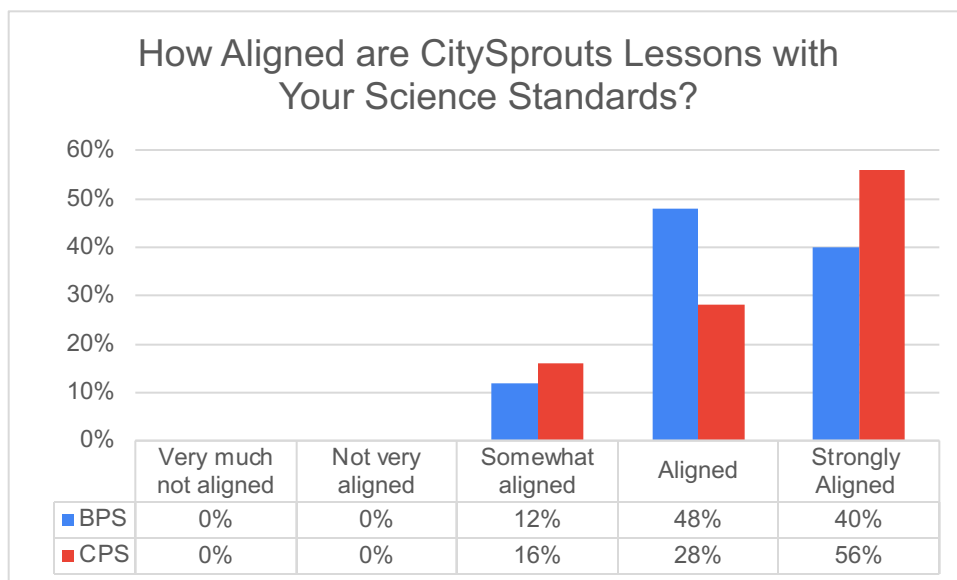
- *A lot of the teachers who don't work with them...it's first come first serve. I think that CitySprouts does a great job, but it's up to the admins to encourage teachers to take advantage of this. Sometimes teachers are overwhelmed, and this is one more thing. So having our admins and team leaders to speak up about this would get more teachers to sign up. It's not like there's not opportunity. (BPS Teacher)*
- *The buy in is good in my school, so everyone wants to do it. We have CitySprouts on Mondays, but we have a fulltime science teacher. So I get science twice a week and I have CitySprouts. So I'm very lucky. I just wish in general that more edu would realize the value of CitySprouts and it would spread and get more funding. (BPS Teacher)*

BPS teachers discussed a particular district policy that seems to sometimes get in the way of their participation in CitySprouts. Apparently CitySprouts programming is not “specialist” time (e.g., as art, PE, etc. might be) and therefore teachers have to be present when CitySprouts works with their students. Teachers note that this limits the amount of time that they can devote to CitySprouts as they have other curriculum responsibilities that need to occur during those times when they are teaching (and their classes are not in “specialist time”). These teachers believe that activities that are part of “specialist time” are ones which can be longer (e.g., projects) and can involve more explicit curriculum connections than the short, one-off, activities that they can just fit in on their own. The upshot seems to be that teachers have to have a particular interest in engaging with CitySprouts as it is not necessarily convenient for them to do so otherwise.

### CitySprouts' Perceived Connection with the Curriculum



Not surprisingly, given the seniority of most of the teachers responding to the survey and participating in the focus groups, teachers express strong familiarity with their districts' science standards and curriculum.



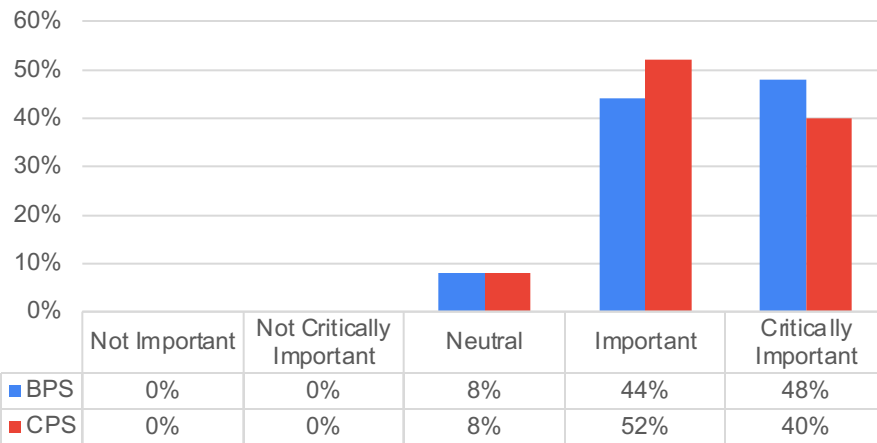
Teachers believe that for the most part CitySprouts programming is aligned with the science standards that they teach; although teachers repeatedly note that in the grade levels that they teach (majority PK – K), science in general is not strongly emphasized.

- *In our school, our science curriculum has integrated science with social studies. So having CitySprouts allows [students] to do science all year long. So [the garden educator] is covering those standards that we don't have time to cover. CitySprouts covers so much in terms of standards and objectives and hands on activities. (BPS Teacher)*
- *The focus in 2<sup>nd</sup> for BPS is heavily literacy-based. We do have time for science, but the amount of time each week is hard to get in much. Having the garden there takes a lot off. (BPS Teacher)*

Teachers in CPS are more explicit about the fact that they have a district science curriculum for Kindergarten (“Focus on Kindergarten”) and that CitySprouts aligns with that.

- *We're using the Focus on Kindergarten curriculum. Lots of great overlap to CitySprouts. Looking at insects, taking care of earth, conservation, ecology. All things that are in that Focus curriculum. The curriculum has a lot of pieces and a lot of classroom teachers are trying to make sure that all of those pieces are done well. That can be a challenge, so having the CitySprouts educator can make all of that feel more substantial. (CPS Teacher)*

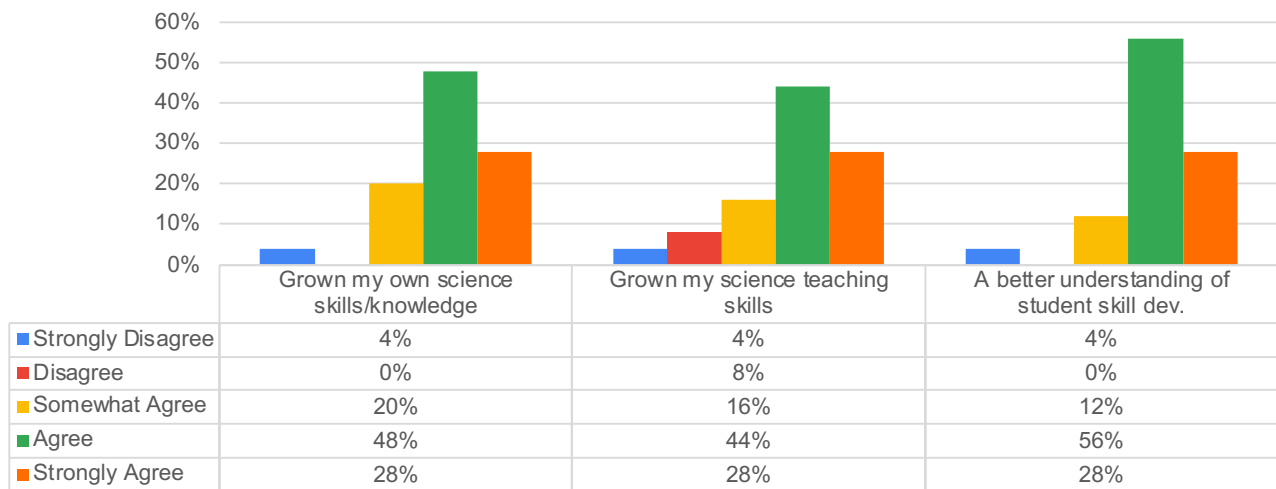
## How Important is CitySprouts as a Science Resource?



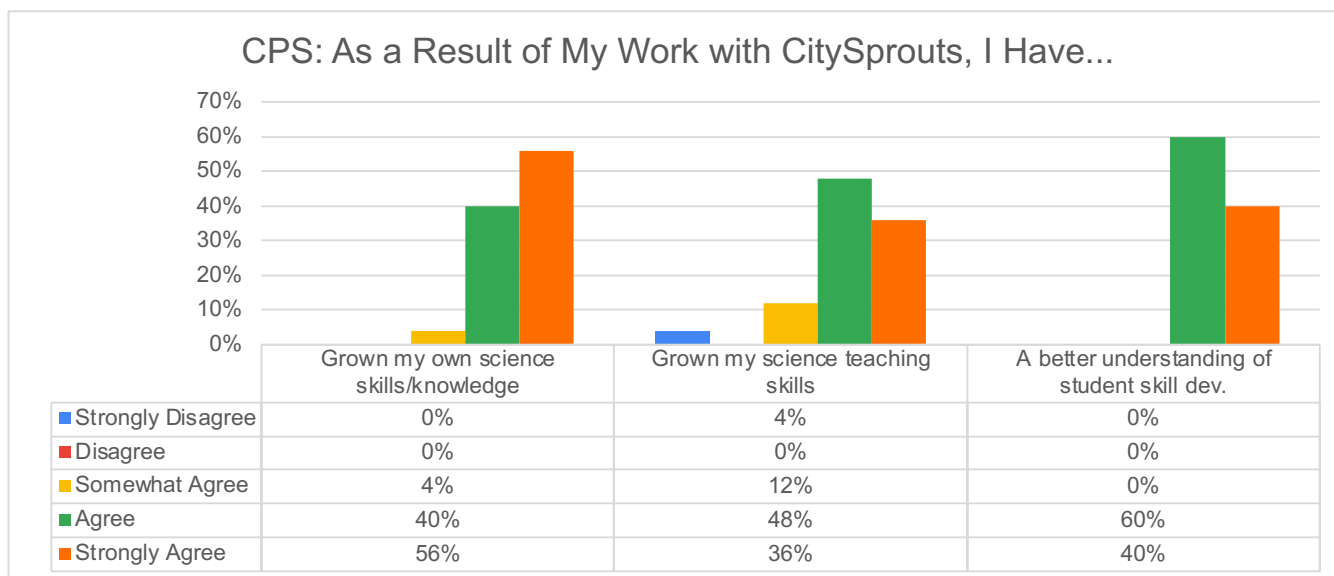
Survey data shows that the majority of teachers in both districts believe that CitySprouts is an important or even critically important science resource for their students.

In both districts, teachers also agree that CitySprouts has had positive benefits on their own science and science teaching skills and their understanding of how students develop science skills.

## BPS: As a Result of My Work with CitySprouts, I Have...







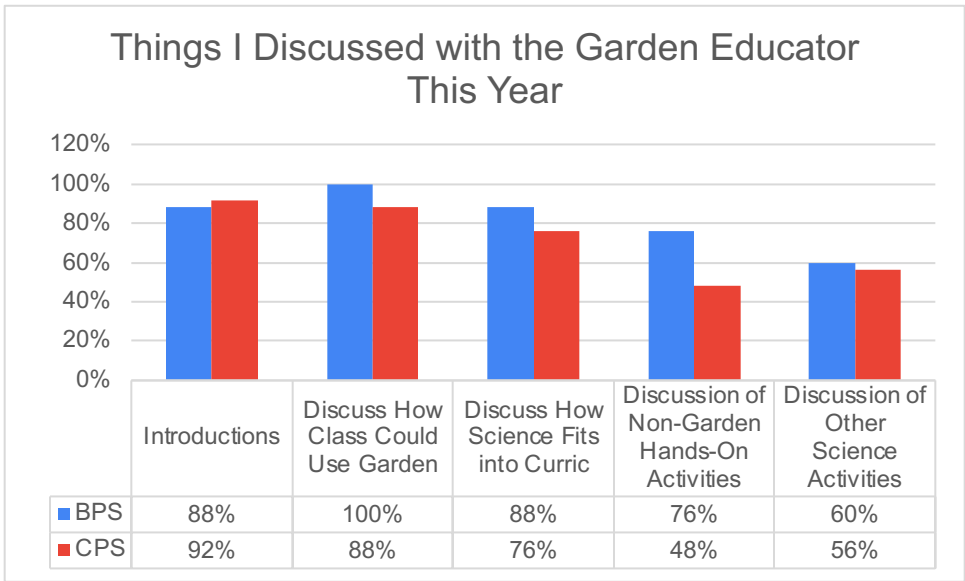
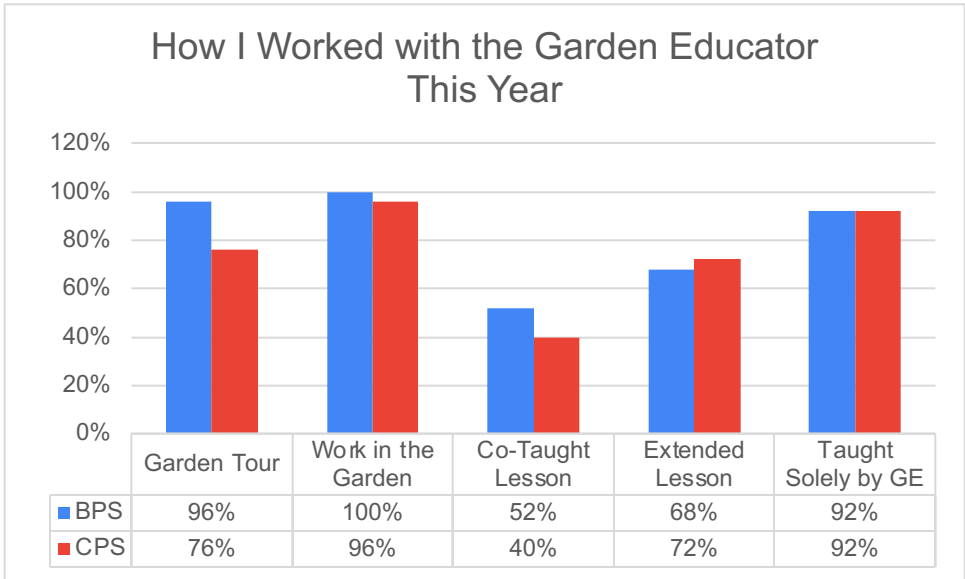
In both districts, teachers are generally confident (over 4 on a 5 point scale) that they will continue to find ways to integrate CitySprouts in future school years. This of course is not surprising as the majority of these survey respondents are senior staff who have utilized the program for many years in the past.

Teacher confidence that they will find a way to integrate CitySprouts in future school years:

- BPS = 4.12
- CPS = 4.64

This finding does point to the fact that gaining participation from less-senior, newer, teachers presents one of the program's challenges. Since our current research did not reach many less experienced teachers, and there does not seem to be any external pressure on teachers (e.g., administrative support) to take up work with the program, factors involved in recruiting less experienced teachers remain unknown.

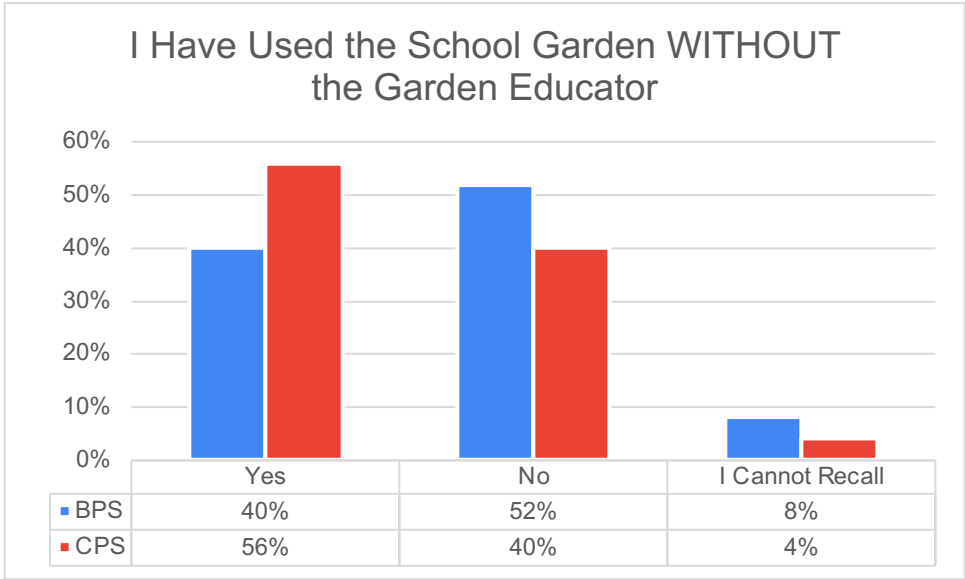
# What Have Teachers Done with CitySprouts This Year?



Based on survey responses, teacher work with the garden educators seems quite consistent across sites and districts. Likewise, focus group respondents all noted similar experiences.

- There have been a lot of experiences. The kids have really enjoyed planting and putting their hands in the dirt. The sticks. Touching the plants. Really enjoyed having a purpose for that. (BPS Teacher)*
- We were just out with students on Monday. Digging and looking for worms, pill bugs, identifying plants and weeds. Learning how to weed garden beds in beds they had planted before. Noticing sprouts. Identifying weeds vs. plants. Lots of fun. (CPS Teacher)*

Teachers in focus groups frequently came back to stories of similar, yet frequently occurring, experiences. Close to half of BPS survey respondents, and more than half of CPS respondents indicated that they have had opportunity to use the garden without the garden educator. For the most part, these teachers seem to engage in garden activities that are quite similar to those which they do with the garden educator.

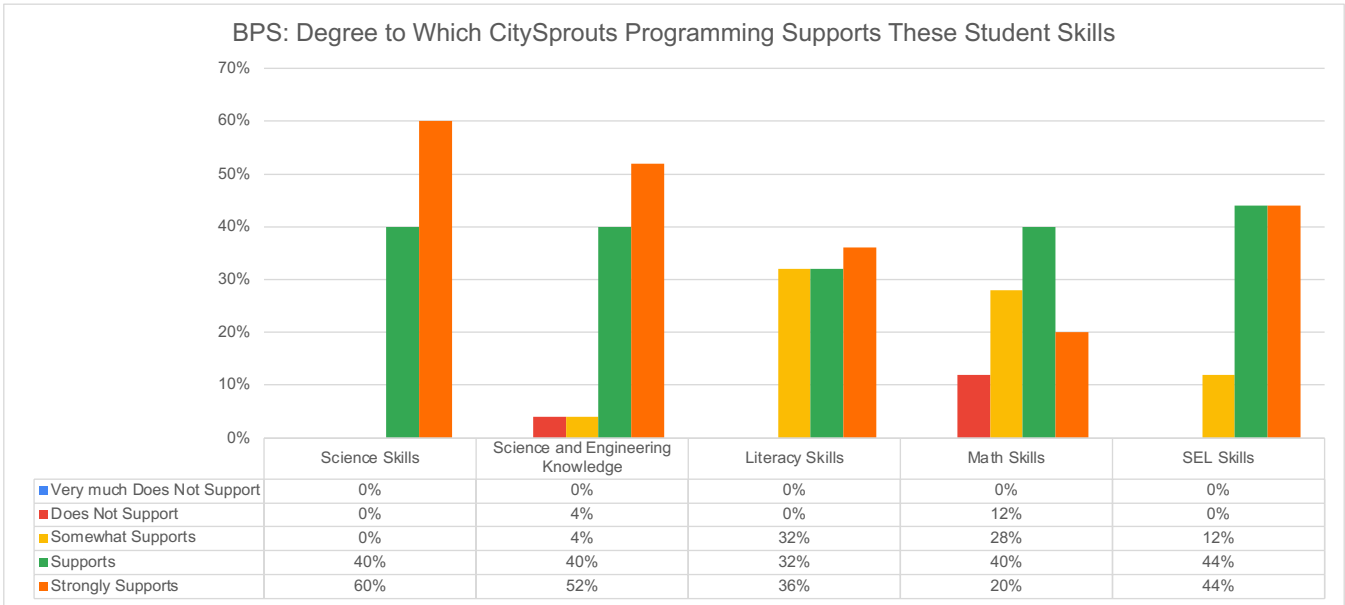
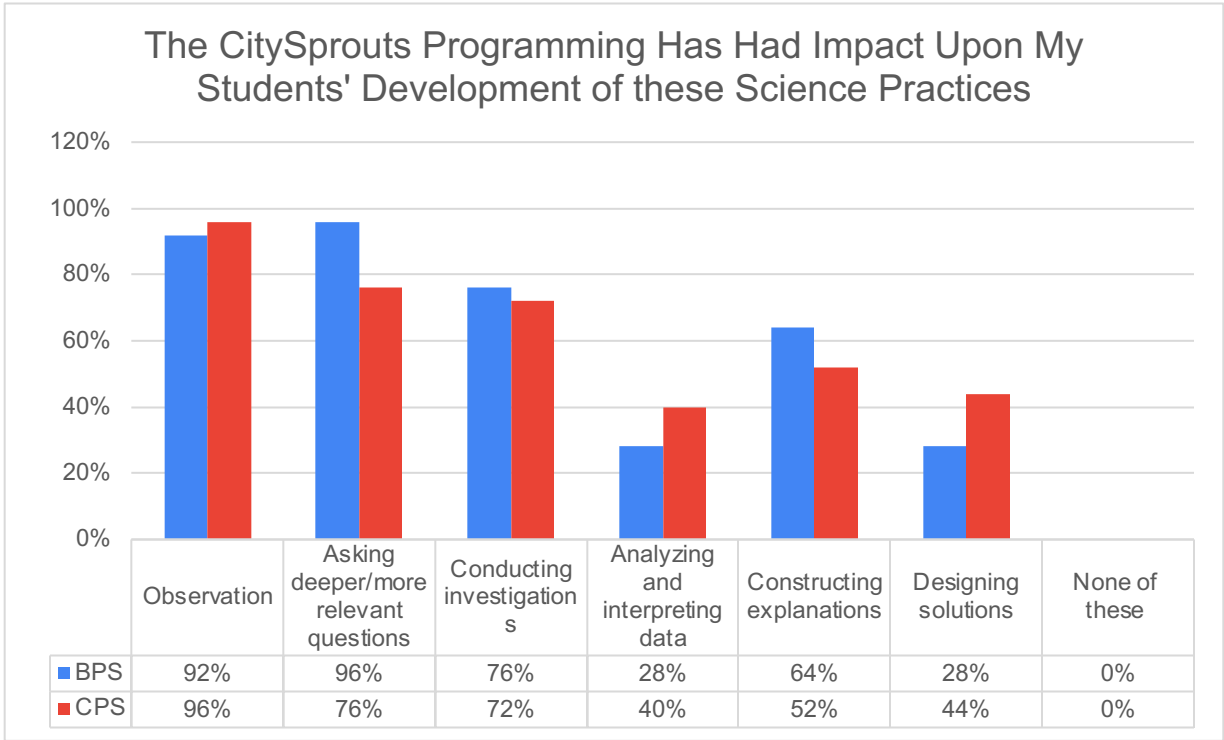


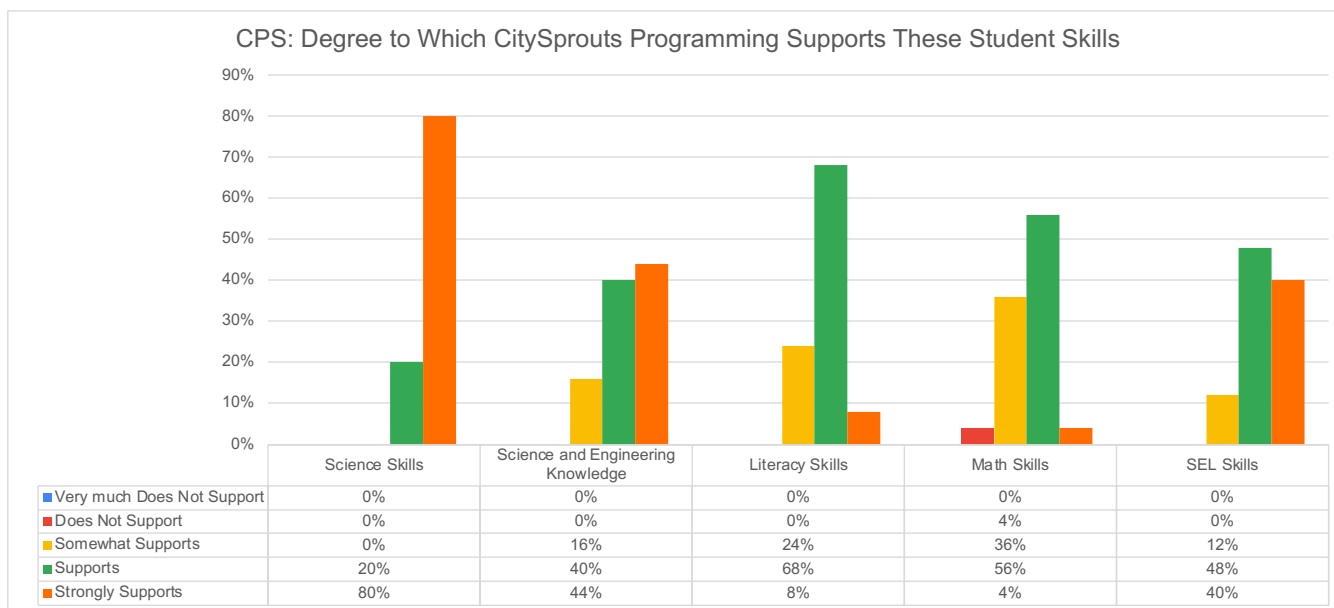
Descriptions of ways teachers have used the garden without the garden educator include:

- We continue to observe for any changes in the plants, explore and dig where we can, look for and observe different creatures. Some friends like to read and engage with the garden signs.
- We used it for an SEL lesson when we explored why it felt good to take care of something else and transitioned that into why it's important to take care of our school.
- Learning about compost and how to care for plants and earthworms.
- We continued setting up and exploring the digging and watering station structure students are familiar with from the garden educator.
- We did some observations, looked and listen for signs of spring and drew in our science notebooks. We also have done a garden scavenger hunt.
- Extended lessons from the curriculum, practiced/developed observation and recordings of those observations
- Looked for natural materials; I spy games; just taking time to enjoy the garden and see what we observe
- We go out to spend time in the outdoors, meet as a class and read stories, and also observe the garden and what is happening in the garden. We also observe animals, insects, etc.
- Watered the plants. Observed how the plants were growing and changing.
- Sensory walks, time outside
- We have conducted some different observations, and have also used the garden for a quiet break/reflection spot for kids who need an emotional regulation reset.
- Tree study and colors in the garden
- Nature walk and to look for plants and animals
- during writing time, center time
- We released our butterflies into the garden and found flowers they might like

# Teacher Perceptions of the Student Impact of CitySprouts Programming

Teachers were surveyed as to what science practices the CitySprouts work has had the most impact upon with their students. Here, teachers identified “observation” and “questioning” as being the most significant. Data in this regard was very similar across the two districts.





Teachers in both districts clearly identified “science skills” and “science knowledge” as the student skills that CitySprouts most supported. Nevertheless, in general – with the exception of Math skills – teachers felt that CitySprouts supported students in all queried skill areas.

In their additional text comments, surveyed teachers offered more detail as to how they felt CitySprouts supported student learning.

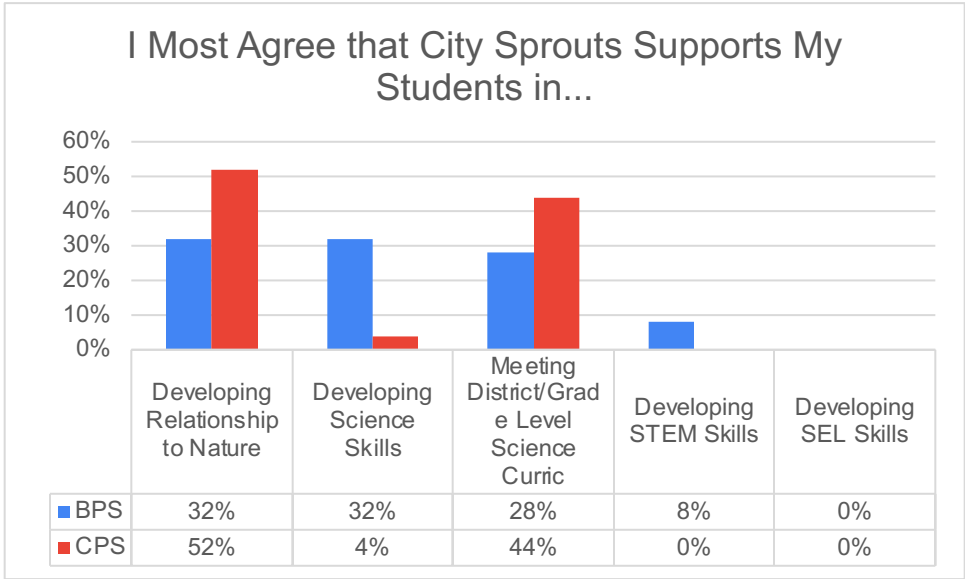
- Lessons such as square gardening was connected with our engineering unit. Math, science, engineering, reading was all integrated. Students made many connections.
- The activities in which we participate through CitySprouts strongly tie into our K0-K1 curriculum, particularly our last unit of the year. Having garden throughout the year helps expose, strengthen, and reinforce the content and concepts beyond that specific time of the school year. My students are able to see how they can make connections and apply the same content or skills in different ways beyond just in our classroom and with me.
- science skills were used routinely to observe what was brought in to observe and then we wrote about what we saw. we also worked on literacy skills by writing our observations. I think the care within the garden was practice in social emotional skill of caring for something and self-management
- We worked to put math and counting in the lessons.
- I am always looking for opportunity and ways to integrate hands-on activities into my curriculum for my PreK students. CitySprouts has made it accessible for this to happen.
- The Focus on K2 curriculum has a unit all about the Earth. I have read books about gardening and the plant life cycle, and flowers. Students learn how to take turns while they are in the garden. The hands on experiences of gardening gave student a better appreciation of taking care of our school garden and nature.
- The CitySprouts lessons were connected in many ways to our curriculum for science. The SEL parts were having to work together in the garden, follow the plan, take care of materials.
- We did so many science activities including observations, drawing, experiments, and nature walks. Students got to take care of the gardens by, weeding, planting seeds and watering. My class LOVES garden time and it is important to do especially for the students who do not have the experience of working in a garden.

- I feel the garden enriches our curriculum and opens up a world many of our students would not be able to have otherwise.
- My instructor incorporates literacy, math skills as well as science knowledge into his lessons.
- The garden and hands-on experiences with life sciences are directly connected to science. Outdoor experiences have also been shown to be helpful SEL for students with ADHD. The delivery and student check-in by Austin each week is good SEL practice as well.
- Hands on learning is so engaging, I feel like met students are real scientists
- For some children, being out in the garden is a very calming experience for them. Seeing themselves as caretakers of the garden and everything in them gave them a sense of pride and purpose.
- Students are exposed to science objectives such as how planets are formed, parts of plants, they are able to use scientific methods to observe and analyze different plants. Also being in the garden helps them socialize and keep their emotions regulated!
- City sprouts covers a lot of science and social emotional skills. We learn new vocabulary about gardening and creatures who live in the garden.
- Some of the key aspects of the garden are hands on activities, ownership, and responsibility.
- Learning to respect and take care of nature.
- I'm discouraged to see the numbers go down each year of our classrooms to have time for CitySprouts collaboration in their rigid district schedules as years past. But I will tell you more student are having behavioral referrals not having programs like CitySprouts as part of their path to learning.

Focus-grouped teachers were asked specifically about the degree to which CitySprouts supports the needs of non-traditional learners and students with disabilities. Teachers provided examples of several ways that this support is occurring:

- *I think the sensory aspects of it has had a big impact. It's been therapeutic for them. Just touching the soil. They are much less worried about it by the end of the year. Also giving the kids the opportunity to taste the veggies grown in our garden. And also being ok if they don't want to do things. They feel special when they use different tools. (BPS Teacher)*
- *In my school it helps them to be more involved and using their hands and more tools to learn. We only have a few kids with IEPs, but I'm thinking more about the language. So having the Bilingual garden educator helps a lot. In my case I'm thinking about the language model. (BPS Teacher)*
- *One of my students had a lot of difficulties to stay in a whole group setting. Very distracted. Looking at other points in the room. Even in the late fall, the CitySprouts lessons were the ones she was always on the rug for. Even if we were in the classroom the whole time, she was tuned in to the CitySprouts lessons. She uses some verbal language, but not very consistently. She was enraptured by the snails that the garden educator brought in. "Do you have the snails today"...this is often her longest sentence all day! Very connecting to the content. (CPS Teacher)*
- *I also think that it's a very soothing thing to be outside and work with our hands. Students who are not engaged in the classroom are engaged in the garden. Especially boys. It's our garden, we have jobs to do. They know that we're caretakers of it and don't go running around. (CPS Teacher)*

Surveyed teachers were asked to identify the way that they feel that CitySprouts most supports their students. Teachers in both districts identified “Developing a Relationship to Nature” as the area of greatest impact. CPS teachers also highlighted support to the district science curriculum, although curiously ranked “Developing Science Skills” quite low (only 4% of CPS teachers chose this as the greatest impact of the program).



**Satisfaction with the Garden Educator**

As in all previous years of data collection, surveyed and focus-grouped teachers were profoundly appreciative of, and loudly sang the praises of, their garden educator. The garden educator was credited with creating strong student engagement and very broad teacher satisfaction.

Student engagement with the GE (5-point scale)

- BPS = 4.68
- CPS = 4.8

Teacher satisfaction with GE (5-point scale)

- BPS = 4.76
- CPS = 4.88

Survey comments about garden educator interactions:

- Thank you for a great gardening experience. Kids look forward to it every week. Indoor lessons during the winter are well adapted. Thank you!
- We love having [our garden educator] in our classroom. He is patient, kind, and consistently communicates with teachers in advance about his lessons. Another great asset is that [our garden educator] is a bilingual educator with excellent communication skills in both languages. Thanks to him, the lessons and activities were delivered in Spanish, aligning with Amigos' expectations.
- [our garden educator] is reliable, engaging, and excited about aligning her work with the science standards and even phonics standards I teach.
- [our garden educator] is well organized and motivated to collaborate with the teachers at our school.

- I have enjoyed working with [our garden educator]. He has been very accommodating in being flexible to work in one of our centers during Center time when we are not able to go outside due to the weather and also bringing science to the playground. The students love him!
- [our garden educator] was amazing with my class. She is so knowledgeable and was able to plan developmentally appropriate lessons as well as be flexible when changes needed to be made or students were really interested in something else for the day.
- Our garden educator was wonderful. Her calm demeanor helped me become a better teacher. She engaged kindly and patiently with my PreK students with and without disabilities and got them excited about science. They talk all week about looking forward to gardening on Friday and their parents tell me they talk about it regularly at home. After our garden educator had to leave for a summer job, I have continued to take my students out at our regular gardening time because they love it so much. It has been a rewarding, developmentally appropriate educational experience. I wish we could do gardening lessons every day!
- Each garden class, [our garden educator] would email us before the lesson and objectives. She was extremely organized, and passionate about garden science and engaging the students. She aligned lessons with what we were working on in the classroom. ... She really made Garden the best experience for my students. I am so grateful for her knowledge and expertise in garden science.
- Our garden educator was fantastic. Her classes were engaging and she had great classroom management.
- He is very appropriate and knowledgeable. He is able to work with my very young students, which not everyone can do.
- Appreciated the patience the Gardner had with the students. Emails community what will be taught during garden visit.
- [our garden educator] is such a knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and patient educator--students look forward to her coming each week. Some of our K students started the year with limited stamina for whole group lessons and writing/drawing activities, but I noticed these students often showed high levels of engagement during our City Sprouts times.
- [our garden educator] has excellent class management skills and the kids in my class responded well to all of his lessons and activities
- Continue having bilingual Educators.

As the survey comments above reference, those several garden educators who work to communicate in languages other than English are particularly appreciated. This came through in focus group comments as well:

- *[Our garden educator] is very thoughtful about building relationships with students. We have a high cape Verdean pop so he puts up signs in Creole and Spanish. Looking to communicate with teachers and connect with them things. (BPS Teacher)*

Focus grouped teachers were asked if there were aspects of the program that they would like to see improved or enhanced.

- *It's not about our garden educator, but just about the amount of time they can spend in each school. They can only work with K-2, but we are K-8. I have garden every week, but other grades need to alternate. So more time. (BPS Teacher)*



- *I would like to see instead of 30 minutes, maybe a little more time., Like 45 or a whole class period. And continue having someone there who is fully bilingual. I would love to have more. I would like the garden educator to be more of a specialist. (BPS Teacher)*
- *Start CitySprouts earlier in the year, not in October! (BPS Teacher)*

These focus group comments were also echoed in survey additional comments:

- I wish the Garden Educator was full time or had more days available at our school. Our gardener this year was AMAZING but due to our schedule we could only make it work a few times - I wish we could have scheduled more opportunities to work with her in the garden with more regularity (CPS Teacher)
- It has been a big benefit and I love that every grade is included in the program. Often, my preschoolers are left out and with you, they are not. (BPS Teacher)
- I hope that next year we would be able to have weekly visits with the gardener, rather than bi-weekly. (BPS Teacher)
- I am sad that the weekly times are being cut to bi-weekly but some is better than none. (CPS Teacher)

These comments highlight an overall finding from focus grouped teachers that they would like there to be more time with CitySprouts versus the once a week or sometimes every other week schedule for their classes that now exists.