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Local

## Program nurtures kids' growing knowledge

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**By: Sarah Haughey**  
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City school grounds look more like jail yards than playgrounds, but thanks to the San Francisco Green School Yards Alliance, the gray concrete is turning green.

The local nonprofit coalition, formed in 2001, works with educators and parents to promote outdoor learning in the San Francisco Unified School District.

"Kids know what a french fry looks like, but they don't know what a potato looks like," said Jim Chappell, the interim executive director of SF Beautiful. "The idea is to teach kids where their food comes from and show them that it doesn't have to come in a package from 5,000 miles away — we can grow it in our school yard."



Fun with food: The Growing Green School Grounds Conference aims to get educators and parents involved with environmental issues and teaching kids where their food comes from. (AP file photo)

During the fourth annual Growing Green School Grounds Conference, taking place Sept. 24-25, school principals, teachers and parents will interact with members of environmental organizations and participate in a series of hands-on workshops.

"Saturday is the real guts of the conference," SFGSA Chair Nan McGuire said. "You don't go and sit in a classroom, but instead you work outdoors constructing something like a pond that has a solar panel to recycle water so that kids can learn about solar energy."

At past conferences, teachers have created benches using cob, a sustainable and natural building material, and even a frog-shaped oven so kids could make pizzas using vegetables they had grown in the school garden, McGuire said.

This year's workshops, taking place at three SFUSD locations — Tule Elk Park Child Development Center, Miraloma Elementary School and School of the Arts High School — include tips about rainwater harvesting, organic vegetable gardening and cooking from the garden.

The SFGSA, which began as an all-volunteer beautification effort relying solely on donations, was successful in securing \$7 million in the 2003 and 2006 Proposition A voter-approved school bonds, Chappell said.

According to McGuire, the school bonds have allowed SFGSA to create more outdoor classrooms and maintain their ultimate goal of developing students into sustainable stewards for the environment.

"It's about learning that you can, in fact, make a difference in your own life and make a difference in the environment," Chappell said.

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