

Forget the Textbook: Miami's Public School Students Learned About Nutrition & Resiliency Under a Moringa Tree

The Education Fund Marks Three Years of Support from Life Time Foundation, Expanding Healthier, Greener M-DCPS and Reaching Tens of Thousands of Students

MIAMI, FL, UNITED STATES, July 16, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- For the third consecutive year, The Education Fund (educationfund.org), with support from the Life Time Foundation celebrated Arbor Day in The Education Fund's Food Forest in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. On Friday, April 24, Life Time Foundation (lftfoundation.org) volunteers joined students at Lake Stevens Elementary School to plant trees, harvest fresh produce, and experience firsthand how a schoolyard can become a living classroom.

Students spent the morning as they do each week in their Food Forest: measuring, calculating, tasting, and connecting math and science to the world growing around them. In addition to Life Time team members and volunteers, students were joined by Principal Eric Wright, Lead Teacher Sakinah Lewis, Co-Lead Teacher Niya Dukes, and Nathalie Montenegro from M-DCPS Food and Nutrition. Kelley



A \$75,000 presenting funder grant from Life Time Foundation supports The Education Fund Food Forests for Schools across M-DCPS.



Elementary students receiving the distributed fresh produce to take home.

Kessell, Nikisha Williams, and other volunteers from The Miami Foundation also joined the celebration.

Together, students and volunteers planted calamondin, bay rum, moujean tea, and lemon verbena, and a variety of additional edible and native plants selected to thrive in South Florida's climate and to support both the forest and the families who depend on it.

The Education Fund Food Forests for Schools is a first-in-the-nation, large-scale initiative that transforms schoolyards into eco-labs for student learning, with more than 30 varieties of tropical fruit trees, herbs, and vegetables native to South Florida (including banana, papaya, Barbados cherry, moringa, starfruit, and Okinawan spinach) selected to maximize both nutritional benefits and classroom opportunity.



Elementary students tasting what they foraged in the food forest.

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*Sarah Emola, Senior Director,
Life Time Foundation*

A \$75,000 presenting funder grant from Life Time Foundation supports The Education Fund Food Forests for Schools across Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), the third-largest school district in the United States. The program reaches more than 26,000 public school students across 71 Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Since 2024, the Life Time Foundation has given \$200,000 to support Food Forests for Schools.

In a county where the mean tree canopy cover is just 20 percent, the Food Forests stand apart: average canopy cover across the Food Forests reaches approximately 53 percent, according to a Florida International University study led by researcher Cara Rockwell, PhD. That same

research found that the introduction of Food Forest gardens increased plant species richness by more than 400 percent compared to the grassy areas adjacent to the schools, creating a healthy environment for students and the communities for generations to come.

For Linda Lecht, President of The Education Fund, the program represents the organization's deepest commitment to public school students in Miami-Dade County. “The Education Fund Food Forests for Schools program exists because we believe every child in Miami-Dade County Public Schools deserves a classroom that connects them to the world they live in,” she said.

“These forests teach math and science through soil and sunlight. They send fresh food homes to families who need it. And they are shading the neighborhoods around the schools where our students learn every day. Life Time Foundation’s support makes it possible to keep growing this work.”

The program’s results continue to strengthen. In the 2024-25 school year, 53 percent of participating students improved their nutrition knowledge, and 52 percent shifted toward consuming more nutritious foods.

Eddie Recinos, Program Director for Food Forests at The Education Fund, sees that impact on his students every week. “Students are now the ones explaining to their parents why the tree in their schoolyard matters,” he said. “They measure the growth, they calculate the yield, and then they take that yield home. Since 2015, students have taken home 313,000 harvest bags. Families are shifting their nutrition habits because of what their children learned in a public-school yard.”

“Returning to the Food Forests for a third year speaks to what we value most at Life Time Foundation: investing early in the health of children and the communities and environments that support them,” said Sarah Emola, Senior Director, Life Time Foundation. “Schools are where healthy habits can take root, and The Education Fund’s Food Forests for schools are a powerful example of how wellness grows when a community comes together.”

Miami-Dade County Public Schools has been an essential collaborator in building and sustaining the program across the district. “This initiative supports our district’s wellness goals by integrating hands-on learning, nutrition education, and access to fresh foods. Food Forests empower students to make healthier choices while fostering a deeper understanding of where their food comes from,” said Angie Kasselakis, M-DCPS Food and Nutrition Officer.

The Education Fund Food Forests for Schools program is made possible through the generous support of its funders. Life Time Foundation serves as the presenting funder for this year’s Earth Week and Arbor Day celebration. The program is further supported by the Humana Foundation, Braman Family Foundation, The Batchelor Foundation, TD Bank, TD Charitable Foundation, and Blackstone Foundation. Additional support is provided by the United States Department of Agriculture, the Florida Department of Agriculture, and PNC Foundation. The Education Fund also gratefully acknowledges the School District Education Foundation Matching Grants Program, Miami-Dade County Public Schools Department of Food and Nutrition, Miami-Dade County Public Schools Division of Academics, and Miami-Dade County Public Schools Office of Design & Sustainability for their ongoing commitment to public school students across Miami-Dade County.

Media kit with photos and social media video [available here](#).

About The Education Fund

The Education Fund brings innovative methods to local public schools, raises awareness about

public education, and encourages private-sector investment.

Food Forests for Schools is a first-in-the-nation, large-scale initiative that transforms M-DCPS yards into eco-labs for student learning. The program reaches more than 26,000 public school students across 71 Miami-Dade County Public Schools, providing weekly hands-on lessons in math, science, nutrition, and sustainability. Research from Florida International University confirms the Food Forests achieve approximately 53 percent canopy cover and have increased plant species richness by more than 400 percent compared to adjacent school grounds. 313,000 harvest bags have reached student families since 2015.

The Education Fund invites the community to learn more about The Education Fund Food Forests for Schools program and how to support public school students across Miami-Dade County. Visit educationfund.org for more information.

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