USDA Forest Service Grant Expands The Education Fund's STEM and Tree Canopy Education in Miami-Dade Public Schools

Federal funding supports hands-on lessons, teacher training, educational signage, and family resources through Food Forests for Schools



A student at Ludlam Elementary School references Food Forest for Schools signage about banana circles turning solar energy to food.

MIAMI, FL, UNITED STATES, September 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- MIAMI, Fla. – More than 4,000 Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) students are digging into hands-on environmental science, while 200 local teachers are bringing urban forestry directly into their lessons—all thanks to a major educational push by The Education Fund that's delivering fresh nutrition and sustainability lessons to students and their families.

This project was made possible through a $48,182 grant from the USDA Forest Service in cooperation with the Florida Forest Service, a division of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). The funding enhanced The Education Fund's signature and first-of-its-kind Food Forests for Schools program – which reaches 30,000 students across 71 of Miami-Dade County's public schools – delivering an array of hands-on educational and community benefits:

- Hands-On Lessons to 4,000+ Students: Conducted STEM and environmental science lessons for more than 4,000 elementary students across 12 Food Forests for Schools locations.

- Teacher Training & Expanded Curriculum: Developed a dedicated chapter focused on the benefits and growth pattern of trees at schools within the Food Forest Teacher Field Guide and successfully trained 200 Miami-Dade educators on using forestry and local Food Forests in their daily classroom lessons.

- 12,000 Food Forest Information Cards: Created and delivered educational cards directly into take-home Food Forest harvest bags, extending tree crops, nutrition, and urban canopy lessons to students and their families.

- 24 Interpretive Exhibit Signs: Designed, built, and installed two custom exhibit signs across 12 Food Forest schools, helping students, families, and neighbors identify native tree species and understand urban forest ecosystems.

- Teacher & Family Feedback: Assessed the impact and usefulness of these learning materials across 30 Food Forest schools and 21 edible garden schools to ensure long-term sustainability.



Students complete their course work outdoors, applying the lessons learned under the shaded canopy of the Food Forest.

"Urban Food Forests are more than just green spaces—they are living laboratories that boost science literacy and connect students with nature, which is especially needed in our community," said Linda Lecht, president of The Education Fund. “This support from the USDA Forest Service, in cooperation with the Florida Forest Service, allowed us to bring vital knowledge about our Food Forest tree canopy straight into students’ hands and homes.”

Beyond enhancing outdoor learning labs, the project focused on real classroom results—aiming to boost science test scores by 50% or more after experiencing hands-on lessons in the Food Forests. The program tied into a broader national movement by the USDA Forest Service to grow healthy urban tree canopies, connect communities with nature, and inspire the next generation of environmental leaders.

The USDA/FDACS grant benefited teachers, students, and families at these local public schools:

Avocado Elementary
Charles Hadley Elementary
Charles Wyche Elementary
Coral Park Elementary
CPM/Westview K-8 Center
Miami Beach Fienberg Fisher K-8 Center
Ludlam Elementary
Miami Heights Elementary

Nathan B Young Elementary
North Miami Elementary
Spanish Lake Elementary
Sylvania Heights Elementary

About The Education Fund

The Education Fund brings innovative methods to public schools in Miami-Dade County, the nation’s third largest school district. It informs the community about public education and encourages private sector investment in public education. Due to its success in improving student outcomes (including science scores by 61 percent, eating habits by 54 percent, and college enrollment by 34 percent), The Education Fund has won numerous awards, including the TD Ready Challenge, Greater Miami Chamber’s NOVO Award for Non-Profit Excellence, and the Blue Foundation’s Sapphire Prize. Visit educationfund.org.

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