# Farm-To-School Service Learning Partnership
## Colorado State University and MCV School District 51
## Grand Junction, CO

The Mesa County Valley School District has partnered with the Colorado State University (CSU) Community Alliance for Education and Hunger Relief program to provide students with hands-on learning in agriculture, life sciences, and nutrition. Students start vegetable seedlings in the greenhouse and help plant four acres of vegetables in the CSU Western Colorado Research Center Farm-to-School plots. The same students return in the fall to harvest their produce.



The experiences are more meaningful when the students eat and share what they have grown. As such, the harvests are served on their school cafeteria salad bars and donated to area food banks and pantries.  Since 2017, over 2,000 students have participated in over 6,100 hours of service learning at the Research Center. Roughly 173,000 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables have been distributed through food banks and pantries, the school lunch program and the summer meal service program (the Lunch Lizard).



Teachers and the Community Alliance program work together to enrich the hands-on experiences through pre- and post-field trip classroom STEM activities. Many activities focus on food and nutrition because students are more willing to eat fruits and vegetables if they have positive experiences with healthy foods. Increased knowledge about and repeated exposure to healthy foods through school meals (educational experiences provided by community partners) reduce students' fear of new foods and increase willingness to try them.

The partnership also extends outside of the school building. Students involved in after-school youth organizations participate in service learning with the Community Alliance. Families volunteer to harvest from the orchards and vegetable plots all summer long.  The scale of Research Center and the teaching kitchen facilities allow for students across the district to gain hands-on experiences in agriculture and nutrition in multiple contexts.

Standard 6—Collaborating with the Community