

I-77 Mobility Partners' donation expands aquaponics program at CMS school

Students have been able to grow and eat their own lettuce and other fresh vegetables using the nutrients from live tilapia.



I-77 Mobility Partners recently donated more than \$12,000 to support the Walter G. Byers K-8 school's aquaponics program.(WBTV)

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Published: Feb. 10, 2022

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (WBTV) - A generous donation from a Charlotte company is enhancing one of the STEM programs at a Charlotte Mecklenburg K-8 School.

I-77 Mobility Partners recently donated more than \$12,000 to support the Walter G. Byers K-8 school's aquaponics program.

Aquaponics is the process of growing plants using nutrients from fish.

For the last three years, Walter G. Byers K-8 school has used a hands-on aquaponics lab to teach students about symbiotic ecosystems, growing, and harvesting their own plants.

Students have been able to grow and eat their own lettuce and other fresh vegetables using the nutrients from live tilapia.

"The fish help the plants grow and the plants help the fish grow. By the fish's waste they have bacteria in their waste which helps the plants grow," said fifth-grader Taylor Harris.

They're also feeding and taking care of the fish on a daily basis which is teaching the students personal responsibility and showing them the full cycle of growing their own food.

"It's just fun in general because it's hands-on and we don't have to do a video," Harris said.

This donation from I-77 Mobility Partners will create new partnerships with the school and the community by showing students different career fields in science, agriculture, and entrepreneurship.

"What I-77 has done is allow us to expand this, so our next stage is we created another aquaponics system that is a little bit larger and it's going to allow us to have a co-op for our teachers and our parents at school but also allow us to work with 100 Gardens and I-77 to create a partnership with local restaurants so that our scholars can learn entrepreneurial skills and sell fresh produce," said Principal Anthony Calloway.

Since 2019, the school planned for the aquaponics program to be a benchmark for 2022.

I-77 mobility partners say they plan to invest upwards of \$60,000 into other STEM programs in schools along the I-77 corridor.

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