



Paul Buckowski / Times Union

Malaysia Hector, left, a volunteer with The Vegetable Project, works with Dumari Johnson, 13, an eighth grader at Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School on March 7 in Albany. Volunteers were at the school to show children how to create small greenhouses out of milk jugs.

EDUCATION

Getting dirty helping learn

Albany's Vegetable Project using hands-on learning to teach children gardening

By Leigh Hornbeck

Albany

Bill Stoneman is a vegetable farmer with an agenda.

Stoneman looks at gardening as more than coaxing seeds to grow into plants that bear fruit, more than a summer pastime, more than a harvest. For Stoneman, a garden is a classroom.

The eighth-graders who milled

around a hallway at Albany's Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School on a rainy, cold Monday don't know about the academic research around hands-on learning, also called kinesthetic learning. They are not thinking about the neural pathways formed by using touch, taste and smell as part of a lesson. They know if they follow the steps laid out before them, they might eventually be able to say they grew their own food.

"I like it because it's simple," said Mercedes Rodriguez Fabian, who grew vegetables in the school's garden once before. "It seems like it will turn out."

Stoneman founded the Vegetable

Project in 2009 as he was wrapping up his teaching degree after a professional shift mid-career. A parent whose daughter graduated from Albany High School, he is both committed to and critical of the city's public schools. While working regularly as a substitute teacher at the high school, he saw some students succeed and others who were lost, left cold by a method that has a teacher "shoveling information at them" from the front of the room. His motivation was also personal. He hated school as a kid, always looking for a satisfactory answer to his question, "why do we have to

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