



Bella Greenhouse & Educational Center

Sowing the seeds of success

Bella Greenhouse & Educational Center

60 Academy Road
Albany, NY 12208
518.426.2628

Kris Youmans

Chief Education Officer &
Superintendent
518.369.6913
Kris.Youmans@nrfs.org

Jennifer Guernsey

Senior Program Director &
Principal
Neil Hellman School
518.426.2628
Jennifer.Guernsey@nrfs.org

Jenan Pullis-Sayles

Vocational Coordinator
Neil Hellman School
518.426.2622
Jenna.Pullis-Sayles@nrfs.org

Karoline Hart

Greenhouse Coordinator
Neil Hellman School
Karoline.Hart@nrfs.org

By the Numbers

Students enrolled:
...at Neil Hellman School 154
...in greenhouse program ... 154

Ages of participating
students 6–20
Flower beds 10
Acres 19
Herb varieties 20
Plant varieties 40
Flower varieties 30
Worms 1,000

*For more information or to
arrange for a tour of the
Bella Greenhouse and
Educational Center, contact
Jenna Pullis-Sayles.*

*These services are provided by
Northern Rivers Family of Services
and member agencies.*

**NORTHERN
RIVERS**

The Bella Greenhouse & Educational Center at the Neil Hellman School is a year-round educational program that helps connect youth to nature, nurtures an understanding of the importance of ecology, complements classroom instruction, and helps youth develop life and career skills. It consists of planning, planting, nurturing, harvesting, and consuming or selling plants.

Created in 2002 thanks to a lead gift from the Luzzi Family and a grant from Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Capital Region, “Bella” is an acronym for botanical expressions of Linda Luzzi Affection, which appears etched on a stone in front of the building.

The Bella Greenhouse & Educational Center provides hands-on learning and career training for youth and staff interested in gardening and agriculture. Additionally, students develop lifelong skills regardless of their chosen career paths. In addition to learning gardening, horticulture, and ecological basics, they learn how to work in a professional environment with schedules and timesheets, and how to design, perform, and document their own experiments with growing plants. Lessons learned on the land are tied to classroom instruction in multiple disciplines.

The program is directed by a professional greenhouse coordinator and educator with support from school staff. Youth of all ages participate in daily greenhouse operations each week, and classrooms participate in weekly integrated lessons at the facility and with greenhouse staff.

Programming Core Components

- Youth focus on multiple study areas in horticulture, agriculture, and environmental stewardship, all of which illustrate the student’s part in the earth ecosystem. The greenhouse also provides a place for respite in its sanctuary with its pond with fish trained to eat from student’s hands, sensory plants (smell, touch, and taste), music, and wind chimes.
- The greenhouse has a school community garden, cultivating vegetables, flowers, and herbs. Using the principles of biodynamic gardening and farming, students work through a program designed to teach soil studies that feed the soil first, so that plants produce food, herbs, and flowers within the ecosystem of the soils. The produce from these programs are used in Northern Rivers’ daily food services offerings; the herbal classes teach students the power of herbs in wellness, and floral design allows students take part in the joyful sharing of their own designs with staff on the Albany campus.
- Other facets of learning include composting and vermiculture, which help youth learn how to eliminate food waste, understand the importance of recycling, and learn more about our ecosystem

Benefits

- Meaningful vocational education for Neil Hellman School day and resident students.
- Year-round opportunity for students and residential youth to develop and enhance agricultural and horticultural skills.
- Extension of learning activities to homes and families.
- Hands-on experiences to augment students’ academic and vocational experiences.
- Emotional healing, development, and support, such as participation on mental health awareness month activities and mind/body earth awareness.