

Semillas to Sunflowers Summer 2022

Life Lab Pilot Program in Collaboration with Pajaro Valley Unified School District



"Hummingbird. Huitzitzilin. Colibrí. Chuparosa. Now you know what to call it in English, Nahuatl, and two ways in Spanish." - counselor to students during morning meeting

This summer, the UC Santa Cruz Life Lab partnered with Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) to address historic inequities in environmental, garden-based education by expanding access to summer programming for PVUSD students. Life Lab hosted 150 PVUSD students for six immersive, week-long experiences that cultivated children's love of learning, nourishing food, and nature. The Life Lab Garden Classroom was a welcoming and inspiring place, and the joyful, nature-based experiences on a university campus provided opportunities for kids to develop a sense of belonging in a college setting, to build community, and to exercise their bodies and minds.

The Educational Partnership Center at UC Santa Cruz conducted an external evaluation of the program. We collected two types of data for this evaluation: pre- and post-surveys of students' attitudes and beliefs and ethnographic field notes. We observed an exceptional program that created spaces for PVUSD students to feel seen, represented, and understood.

"I'm glad my mom made me do this program." - overheard in the garden

Positive Effects of Programming



Students feel more comfortable in nature.

A paramount goal of Semillas to Sunflowers is to provide children with positive experiences in nature. Students were statistically significantly more comfortable after a week's participation.



Students believe people are part of nature.

The Semillas to Sunflowers program sought to help children understand how people are a part of the interconnected web of life. Humans can have profound impacts on the natural world, for good or ill, and the program gently teaches students how to be respectful stewards through a variety of experiences. Students showed a statistically significant increase in understanding that people are part of nature.



Students are comfortable at UCSC.

Feeling comfortable on a university campus is a strong indicator of a students' likelihood of applying to and attending post-secondary school. This statement only appeared on the post-survey, and students rated their comfort being on the UC Santa Cruz campus a 4.82 out of 5.