At the South Whidbey Elementary School Farm, Lily Kirmo, left, Arlo McLachlan, fourth-grade teacher Jonathan Forbes, Ryan Ferguson and Caleb Arndt, far right, weigh just-picked pumpkins and squash. (Photo by Patricia Guthrie/Whidbey News Group)

Pupils pick precious pumpkins for pies
School garden harvests lessons of land

By Patricia Guthrie
Friday, October 12, 2018 1:56pm | NEWS

Pumpkins particularly and proudly picked by pupils will soon pop up in pies.
Wednesday, fourth graders from South Whidbey Elementary School spread out in the half-acre school garden to each select a sugar pie pumpkin, red kuri squash or butternut squash, all of which are bound to be baked into various dishes for a harvest celebration.

“My favorites veggies here are carrots and corn,” said Kaileena Hill, as she picked a plump carrot for snack time. “I’m not sure about eating pumpkins, though.”

Students weighed the pumpkins on scales, then recorded the data on a spreadsheet. Back in class, numbers will be crunched, so to speak, into various mathematical challenges, such as the total poundage of sugar pie pumpkins and how many pies they might produce.

“They’re learning about variety types of squash, how to weigh fresh produce, how to graph the results and they’ll take that back into class and use it in math,” said Cary Peterson, who oversees the backyard plot known as the Kitchen Garden.

They’ll also soon learn that pumpkins are not just for carving into giant jack-o-lanterns, but they are for eating — in pies, muffins, bread, cookies, lattes and more. Scrumptious — if you like the taste of the orange orb, that is.

Learning how to make pumpkin pies is next on their plate, said Nadean Curtiss, who teaches cooking and other lessons using farm-fresh ingredients.
The pies will be served as part of the Turkey Feast on Nov. 15 that the cafeteria kitchen staff prepares every year for staff, students and their families.

The district also has several other gardens, including one in front of its high school.

Planted in 2014, South Whidbey School Farms has a contract with Chartwells, the national corporation that supplies schools nationwide with meals. It’s the only school district with a contract with Chartwells, selling about 1,000 pounds of produce annually.

The program is supported with major funding from Goosefoot.

“Kids do all the work, all the mulching, all the weeding, all the planting and then they learn about composting,” she added.

Because pumpkins provide a prime example of decomposition, the district encourages community members to drop off their jack-o-lanterns after Halloween to the back of the school.

“Then we spread them all out and the students watch as the huge mass turns different colors, then black, then disappears into the earth,” Peterson said. “Ask any student here, they all know the meaning of the word ‘decomposition.’”
Fourth graders at South Whidbey Elementary School pick a pumpkin from the school’s Kitchen Garden to turn into a pie next month. They weighed the pumpkins, recorded the information and then scurried off to pick a fresh snack, carrot, cherry tomato, kale or beans. (Photos by Patricia Guthrie/Whidbey News Group)
Gabe O’Brien shows off his giant gourd picked Wednesday.