



PHOTO: JOE DANIELS

Danny Blanca, Mike Tam, Gary Appel and Stephanie Locatelli of Green Acres School Project Life Lab check out the sprouts.

They work so well, in fact, that an independent evaluation of the program, using test scores such as the SAT, concluded that Life Lab students have demonstrated significant growth in reading as well as science and nutrition.

The success of Green Acres School has not gone unnoticed by school officials in Santa Cruz County. Plans have already been made to extend the program to 10 elementary schools throughout the County. "After our federal funding was exhausted," said Gary Appel, "groups such as Friends of the Harvest and the Packard Foundation continued to support us. These folks want to see progressive educational methods spread throughout the County."

Local groups were not the only people impressed with Project Life Lab. Robert Yager and Roger Johnson of NSTA visited Green Acres for three days in March to see for themselves if gardens and greenhouses really could teach children science. These two men are on "a search for excellence" in science-education methods at the grade school level. Funded by the National Science Foundation, their

investigation has led them to Green Acres School, which is one of six elementary school science programs chosen in a nationwide selection process.

"Mr. Yager and Mr. Johnson were so impressed with Life Lab," said Judy Ingberman, Community Outreach Coordinator for the school, "that they felt similar programs could not only work County-wide, but even in such large cities as Chicago as well." At a press conference, Mr. Yager, a graduate school professor of science education at the University of Iowa, explained what it is about Project Life Lab that has so impressed the NSTA.

"Usually in our schools," he said, "science is learned from textbooks, not from experience. Most programs load kids' heads with definitions. It has even been said that many science books contain more words and phrases unfamiliar to students than if they were to study two years of French. Life Lab is not a textbook program, nor are any of the other five schools we will visit. Instead, these kids learn basic science through science application."

This process of science application is facilitated by what Yager sees as the strong bonds between teachers, parents and the community. "The ties between kids, parents, teachers and UCSC interns is truly noteworthy," he said. "There is strong community interest in how the school is doing. Everyone feels like the school is theirs — the school board, the 4-H, the Friends of the Harvest, the teachers and staff, and, most important, the kids."

"The parents are very enthused with this program," said Roger Johnson. "Some moved their families across the freeway so that they could send their kids here."

With the Reagan administration allocating more funds for improved science education in elementary and high schools, both Yager and Johnson feel that the money would be well-spent implementing Life Lab programs across the country. "We need to use the application of science to get at the minds of the kids," said Yager. "The NSTA has recognized Green Acres as being exemplary in its field, and there is nothing like recognition to move others in that direction." □