



Prospect Heights School District 23

Board Memorandum

Information Item

Date: September 18, 2025

Subject: District 23 Garden Curriculum Update

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This informational item is being provided to update the Board of Education on curricular connections to the District 23 gardens that supplement our curriculum in all four schools.

The garden program in Prospect Heights School District 23 is an integral part of children's learning throughout the school district for many reasons. We believe there are several reasons why our school gardens are important, including:

- **Academic Enrichment:** The garden acts as a living laboratory where students can directly apply and reinforce concepts learned in various subjects.
- **Promoting Healthy Eating and Nutrition:** One goal of the garden program is to connect students with their food and encourage healthier habits.
- **Fostering Social-Emotional Development:** Gardening requires teamwork, responsibility, and patience, which helps students develop crucial life skills.
- **Environmental Stewardship and Awareness:** School gardens are an ideal tool for teaching students about their local environment and the importance of sustainability.
- **Community Engagement:** A school garden can be a central hub that brings together students, teachers, parents, and volunteers. It can be a focal point for events and a way to build shared purpose within the community.

Below, you will find a summary of each school's garden experience and how each school specifically leverages this unique experience to supplement the district's curriculum. While there are curricular connections across all subject areas, including reading, writing, and mathematics, we are focusing on the connections within science and social studies in this report.

Eisenhower Elementary School:

The Eisenhower Garden is located at the front of Dwight D. Eisenhower Elementary School. Students in each classroom participate in the garden experience beginning with the annual Patriot Day Planting in September. During this activity, classes plant bulbs to initiate their classroom experience and begin the growth cycle.

- **Early Childhood:**
 - **Science** - Students are supported by the garden's sensory-rich environment, which supports development across all domains. They can observe and describe patterns of plant growth, learn about the needs of living things, and investigate the roles of insects and other animals in the garden ecosystem. In addition, the collaborative nature of gardening helps children develop social skills. They learn to take turns, work together to complete tasks, and share tools. This promotes cooperation and a sense of community.
 - **Social Studies** - Students learn to contribute to a shared goal and understand their role in a group. Students can also learn about different jobs and where their food comes from. They can even pretend to run a farm stand, learning about goods, services, and exchange.
- **Kindergarten:**
 - **Science:** Students use observations to describe what plants and animals need to survive. A school garden allows them to directly observe these needs by planting seeds in different conditions (e.g., with and without sunlight or water) and seeing the results. The garden can also be used as a model to represent the relationship between living things and their environment. Students can observe how a plant's location in the garden (sunny vs. shady) affects its growth.
 - **Social Studies** - Students learn about rules and responsibilities by creating and following "garden rules". They see how rules help a community thrive and how everyone plays an important role. Students also learn that plants have specific needs to become producers. This introduces the concept of production and the skills needed to create goods.

- **1st Grade:**

- **Science** - Students can observe how the external parts of a plant (roots, stem, leaves) help it survive and grow. They can also track how the amount of daylight changes over the seasons and how that change affects the garden. They can predict when certain crops will be ready to harvest based on the time of year and the amount of sunlight. This connects seasonal patterns directly to plant life cycles.
- **Social Studies** - Students can observe and document how the environment changes the garden over the seasons. They can also learn how people adapt to their environment to meet their needs, such as by building a fence to keep out animals.

Betsy Ross Elementary School:

While Betsy Ross School has had a gardening experience over the years, we are excited to begin a new experience in 2025-26. The Betsy Ross Garden is called the “Learning Patch” and is a joint effort with Anne Sullivan School. It is located behind Betsy Ross School near the gymnasium. Students in each classroom participate in the garden experience by maintaining their own garden bed. We can’t wait to see the teachers and students take full ownership of all this new opportunity brings.

- **2nd Grade:**

- **Science** - Students observe patterns of growth and development in living things by observing a plant’s life cycle from seed to sprout. They also learn about plant needs by conducting simple experiments with water and sunlight.
- **Social Studies** - Students learn about being community helpers, including the roles of farmers and gardeners in providing food for their community. They also gain an understanding of public spaces and responsibility.

- **3rd Grade:**

- **Science** - Students learn about ecosystems by observing the relationship between plants, insects, and the soil.
- **Social Studies** - Students can learn about global agriculture by researching where plants originated and understanding how agriculture has moved across the globe.

Anne Sullivan Elementary School:

Anne Sullivan School is thrilled to be launching its first-ever gardening experience this fall. The Anne Sullivan Garden is called the “Learning Patch” and is a joint effort with Betsy Ross School. It is located behind Anne Sullivan School near the gymnasium. Students in each classroom participate in the garden experience by maintaining their own garden bed. We can’t wait to see the teachers and students take full ownership of all this new opportunity brings.

- **4th Grade:**

- **Science** - Students can observe how rain is absorbed by the soil and used by the plants, and how water evaporates from the leaves. This is a tangible way to discuss the water cycle afforded to us by the garden.
- **Social Studies** - Students can engage in discussions around land use and how humans have altered the landscape for agriculture and other purposes over the years. They can also research crops that were historically important to Illinois and study the agricultural history of the local area.

- **5th Grade:**

- **Science** - Students learn how plants use sunlight, water, and carbon dioxide to create their own food. The garden provides an excellent living laboratory for studying photosynthesis.
- **Social Studies** - Students research and discuss government policies related to agriculture and food production in the U.S. and Illinois. In addition, the garden can be a starting point for discussions on broader environmental topics, such as sustainable farming, food waste, and the impact of climate on agriculture.

MacArthur Middle School

The MacArthur Garden is located within the “Mac Yard” (courtyard) of MacArthur Middle School. Students in the SAIL classroom participate in the garden experience each year.

- **6th-8th Grade S.A.I.L. Program:** In addition to the academic connections linked to a garden, there are many other benefits for students. The collaborative nature of a garden fosters social skills, teamwork, and communication skills. The garden at MacArthur Middle School is cared for by our 6th through 8th grade S.A.I.L. Program students. It teaches life skills, such as following directions, problem-solving, and responsibility. In addition, gardening provides therapeutic connections, including sensory integration and the development of motor skills.

In summary, we want to thank the Board of Education for supporting our district initiatives. We consider ourselves privileged to provide such well-rounded experiences for our students, and know the benefits of the District 23 Garden Program will extend far beyond the classroom, fostering lifelong learning and a deeper connection to community and the world around us.

Should you have any questions regarding professional development in our district, please contact Dr. Craig Curtis.