

1. CONTACT INFORMATION

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2. PROJECT TITLE

A Working Government...in School and in our Community: The
Playground Rubber Collection Project

3. COMMUNITY PARTNERS

City of Duluth Parks and Recreation, City of Duluth Mayor's Office, County Attorney's Office, Homecroft School Community, Homecroft Kindergarten Buddies

4. NUMBER AND AGES OF STUDENTS WHO WILL BE INVOLVED

27 third graders...but for parts of the project also their 28 Kindergarten Buddies at Homecroft, and the entire Homecroft student population (approximately 400 students in grades K-5)

5. BRIEF OVERVIEW – BIG PICTURE

One of the Minnesota third grade academic standards for social studies is:

“To understand that democratic government depends on informed and engaged citizens who exhibit civic skills and values, practice civic discourse, vote and participate in elections, apply inquiry and analysis skills and take action to solve problems and shape public policy.”

Students have chosen a problem at their school on which to work. Homecroft's new playground has rubber pieces to cushion running, jumping, or falling while playing. This playground surface has been researched and is GREAT for preventing injury, but it is a mess for school custodians, classrooms, and families at home. Many of the little rubber pieces litter the hallways at school, get in the vacuum cleaners when staff vacuum carpets, and go home with children in shoes and pockets.

The third graders will work to come up with a solution for this problem. They will form committees to brainstorm, discuss, and plan...just as leaders in our government do. They will present plans to our principal, and see those plans approved or “vetoed”, again, just as happens in our government.

The project will evolve as students come up with ideas.

An important component will be linking the student project to how our government works, on a local, state, and national level.

We would like to visit local places of government to see WHERE government works, and also to TALK to the people doing this work for us... to hear that they, too, just as we do in our project, work on committees, discuss problems and solutions, and make suggestions for improvement.

I have spoken with the following people, all who seem willing and excited about the third graders visiting their building to tour and hear about our government at work:

Amy Norris, at Parks and Recreation

(Amy talked about the flood damage to the Zoo and to City trails, and how her department has worked to problem solve and repair those areas of our city. She said they meet in a conference room off the Mayor's Office to brainstorm and plan...and that we could meet there when we visit.)

Jessica Tillman, with the Mayor's Office

(Jessica said the Mayor would be happy to meet with the children and talk about how their project compares to work done in his office.)

Mark Rubin, County Attorney

(I spoke with Patti Wheeler, who said she could arrange for students to be in a courtroom and have a judge or judges talk with them. *This is an important one...sometimes not so easy for students to understand the judicial process, especially at the local level.*)

Each has ideas for how students might best learn about the work in their particular area of local government...sitting in a conference room used for committee meetings, discussing the recent flood and damages to trails and the zoo, and how those problems are being solved, gathering in the mayor's reception room, and sitting in a court room to discuss the judicial process.

Students can begin work on this project right away...September/October/November, 2012...and work through the year to implement the playground rubber collection. Hopefully, the project will be something Homecroft continues through the years...to alleviate the rubber litter, and put it back on the playground! Their work relating it to our local government will take place during the months of November, December, and January...as the mayor and other offices are available to meet with the children. Jessica Tillman with the Mayor's Office says he is available November and December, but for one week, and has an open calendar in January, 2013. We will be in contact as to arrange dates.

6. MEANINGFUL SERVICE, PARTNERSHIPS, AND DURATION

The service third graders will provide through this project is personally relevant in that they DAILY experience a problem with excess playground rubber pieces at home and school. They realize, through their family's frustration with the pieces, and the need to clean up classroom floors, that something should be done. When they begin to meet in committees to decide how to tackle this problem, they will relate their work to how our government meets to solve problems, and work toward meeting their social studies standards (see standards listed below).

The third graders work with other classes at Homecroft to solve this problem is a collaboration that will address a genuine school need. Third graders will launch this project, but share responsibility with other students at school to carry out the work. They will share their ideas in each classroom, but also learn from older and younger students for a shared vision of what work needs to be done...and how the project is going. After an initial presentation of their ideas, third graders will write and distribute surveys to give to other classes and the custodial staff, to see if their ideas are working, and what else may need to be done.

Initially, there will be much interest in the project...much excitement...about doing something for our school community. The need for this, though, will continue throughout the year, and students initial investigation, preparation, and planning will transition to continued action, reflection, and revisions. Their visits to local government offices will cement their ideas about work on a project...how there is initially a problem brought to one's attention, then plans, then reflection. The community partners in government offices will connect our action at Homecroft to the "real world" and their required academic standards.

7. CONNECTION TO CURRICULUM AND PROGRESS MONITORING

Third Grade Academic Social Studies Standards include:

"To understand that democratic government depends on informed and engaged citizens who exhibit civic skills and values, practice civic discourse, vote and participate in elections, apply inquiry and analysis skills and take action to solve problems and shape public policy."
(as mentioned above)

...and:

"The United States government has specific functions that are determined by the way that power is delegated and controlled among various bodies: the three levels (federal, state, local) and the three branches (legislative, executive, judicial) of government."

Those are very academic and complicated standards to meet for third graders! A "hands-on" application is a must for students to internalize these concepts. Working on something that affects them, that they see every day at school, will help them to transfer their learning to real life situations. Our goals are to understand that government works as we do on this project...a problem is identified, ideas are gathered and discussed, a plan is formulated, and work carried out to solve the problem. Writing thank you letters, filling out diagrams, writing reflections, and telling other classes about related books we've read will help students meet a variety of

Language Arts standards. As our class finishes a book about, for example, litter sticking to the litterer in The Wartville Wizard, students can give a brief book talk to another class and then loan them the book to read.

Students can monitor the progress of their service to the school with classroom surveys throughout the year, asking if our various classrooms feel there is less playground rubber littering their room. They can also check with custodians before and after the start of the project...asking for their input as to whether things have improved. To capture students' thoughts about the project in the beginning, they can be asked to write, for example, 5 sentences about their project. This will reveal their level of interest and involvement, their sense of the need for what they are doing. As the work progresses, a photo montage with captions they write will show their reflection, and at the same time be a reminder to the rest of the school community that this is important and ongoing. Teacher notes and observations of student conversations can also capture the thoughts of students as they work on this. Finally, feedback from the various community offices can be obtained through a follow-up survey. These will be interesting to post with photos for the families to see...and, again, for the school community.

The curricular goals will be evaluated in student responses to written evaluations/assessments. In an "end of unit" test on government, students will respond to the questions "What did you learn about how government works in our Playground Rubber Collection Project?" "Write about your visit to the Mayor's Office, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Courthouse and tell what you learned there about our local government."

8. ADDRESSING YOUTH VOICE, DIVERSITY AND REFLECTION

There is HUGE opportunity for students to have a say in this project. The brainstorming, voting, deciding on a method of collection of rubber, of dissemination of information to classes, will all come from students. Their work in committees will produce lists of ideas and needs they come up with. They will see first-hand that this process takes time, and much discussion...just as it does in government! They will experience their ideas being approved of or voted down, and the frustration and feelings of accomplishment that come with those experiences.

When students meet in their various committees, they must learn to listen to all in their group, to give everyone a chance to contribute, to have a say. They will be sure to include a quiet child when they learn to ask everyone for their opinion. They will work as our government officials do, and give their thoughts and opinions on a topic, but also listen to others'. (They may be BETTER at this than our government officials!)

The potential to develop real civic responsibility through this project is great. Students will see that they can make an impact. In hearing how their local Parks and Recreation Office dealt with flood damage and repairing of city trails, they'll see that the role of government in the real world is similar to their role in their school project. We have done Venn diagrams for various projects this year...and students can complete such a graphic organizer to compare themselves and this

project to Duluth's Parks and Recreation Department and the flood...or themselves and their project to Wangari Maathai and her planting trees in Africa.

9. FINANCIAL FITNESS

Approximately \$100 is needed to bus the third graders to Duluth's Civic Center...where they will meet with Parks and Recreation, the Mayor, and the County Attorney.

Books purchased to enhance the project include the 5 books on the attached pages, totaling approximately \$65. The books can be used in our classroom for the current project, and then become a part of Homecroft School's Service Learning Library. (also see earlier references to sharing these books with other classes during our project)