

Project Title: Community Gardening

School: Ashlawn Elementary

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Brief summary of the project: During after school hours, with strong support from the Reevesland Learning Garden of Bluemont Park, Ashlawn families received gardening tours and harvested/sampled produce for one week each month in both the Reevesland and Ashlawn beds.

Getting Going

How did the project start? This began as an idea during August 2020 as a way to maintain some hands on experience for Ashlawn students during COVID-19 restrictions. The idea was enthusiastically embraced by Joan Horwitt, head of the Reevesland Learning Garden and Ashlawn principal, Breonna McClain Zeballos.

Who were important people to contact at the beginning? In addition to the above, I also reached out to the PTA president and alerted the second and third grade teaching teams as we began with just those families. I also collaborated with Ashlawn's head custodian for mulch delivery, water access and planning for the bedding spaces.

What are the threshold resources that need to be identified at the beginning before proceeding further? (For example, robust parent volunteer network, elevated loading docks, nearby outdoor spigot.) Our gardens already existed but we used additional resources of gardening tools at both locations, seed purchase (handled by Joan Horwitt) and access to water (needed custodial key for Ashlawn water faucet). I also needed my computer and used a free "Signup Genius" account for reserving spots safely for the families. We needed enough adult volunteers to guide families around each garden and this was accomplished through Joan's Reevesland Educator network.

What are the policies (if any) from APS or elsewhere that may affect the project and need to be considered? We arranged this project initially to be outside of the school hours and outside of the building so that we were following County health guidelines versus APS.

What budget and/or funding sources were needed? PTA funds paid for the seeds and tools.

Implementation

Did you pilot or test the project and then scale it up? If so, describe your process.

Ashlawn has a 8 year history of collaborating with the Reevesland Learning Garden and its founder, Joan Horwitt. We were unable to do our usual full-grade lettuce planting there this fall nor take walking field trips to Reevesland due to COVID so we chose to begin with offering the gardening to the families of the most affected grades only. We kept it at this level for Sept-Dec and then scaled it up to include the entire school population for March-June.

As you rolled the project out, how did you present this to students and encourage their participation? As Sustainability Liaison, I sent monthly invitations to the affected families via both School Talk email (with principal approval/edits) and through the PTA listserv. The School Talk messages were translated into the home languages. I also tried one month to communicate to individual EL families through their teachers and one month did outreach at an apartment complex with hand-delivered notices. Each invitation included a description of the program and directions of how to sign up for a reserved slot (for COVID distancing) using the online "SignUp Genius" charts which I created/monitored. (Families were also required to mask.)

Approximately how many students were actively involved, and how many were affected?

We kept track of numbers by number of participants per month (using a print-out of the SignUp Genius charts) so this will be a rough estimate. We counted a total of 195 participants and probably $\frac{2}{3}$ of these were students. Most of them came at least twice to one garden or another.

What obstacles were overcome? Are there continuing obstacles? What lessons did you learn from doing this? Initially we had to find more volunteer gardening guides as we tried to accommodate 4-5 families at a time in each garden. This was achieved through the Reevesland Learning Garden Educators network and personal contacts. We also discovered that announcements sent through School Talk needed repeating through the PTA list serv for best participation. We learned that 15-minute slots were too brief and that most families overstayed even the 20-minute slots to enjoy the gardens more fully and ask more questions.

Will the project continue into future years? If so, how will you keep continuity? Do you plan modifications? There will be discussion between myself and Joan Horwitt of how to keep this going post-COVID. While most of our energy will revert to school-day experiences for the

students, we would like to see perhaps monthly “community gardening” days at Ashlwn and Reevesland to maintain the interest and support of the parents.

What effect has it had on the school? The administrators, Joan and myself have received countless expressions of thanks from the families who took advantage of our offerings. They said it helped bring the community together outside when schools were closed. They were grateful also for discovering their own connections to the Earth, to healthy eating and to the beauty of gardening.

Are there photos that could help others visualize how this worked for you? If so, please insert them here.

Replication

Do you have resources you used that would be helpful for someone trying to replicate this project? Would you be willing to share them? Joan Horwitt of Reevesland is an inspiration for Any gardening, be it on your school grounds or elsewhere. Her email is: shorwitt@aol.com.

What else should someone wanting to implement a similar project at their school know? Keep going even when turn-out is low. Families really appreciated this and students got to see people of all ages learning from each other.