

## Slow Food Denver and Denver Urban Gardens Community Engagement in the School Garden

How do you get your teachers, staff, parents and students engaged in the school garden and using the outdoor environment?

### *Panelists:*

Mary Ann Bash (Mary\_Bash@dpsk12.org) from Each One Teach One  
Literacy and horticulture program

Katie Brooks (katie\_brooks@engschools.net) Charles Hay  
Community activist and kindergarten teacher

Pallas Quist (pallasquist@gmail.com) from Samuels  
Parent garden coordinator

Nicole Dawson (nikdawson@hotmail.com) from Steele  
Garden committee member and curriculum integration

Feel free to contact the panelists if you have any specific questions

1. Gardens are about community. Include as many people as possible. Don't be afraid to ask for help and talk about your project.

- *Engage the neighborhood*
  - Connect with organizations like Homeowners Associations, neighborhood newsletters, local city council members, neighborhood nonprofits like churches, The Optimist Club
- *Engage the teachers*
  - Find a garden champion at the school. Good candidates are kindergarten teachers, literacy teachers, librarians, school nurse or after school coordinator.
  - Use staff meetings to communicate to teachers
  - Meet with the administration and get their support
  - Meet with teachers individually to tailor garden lesson plans based on standards and Student Learning Objectives
  - Be mindful of school schedules, testing etc.
  - Be welcoming and it's ok if a teacher doesn't want to participate
- *Engage the parents*
  - Have garden sign ups at all school events
  - Pair garden events with larger school events
  - Provide value to the parents, for example parent literacy program based on learning horticulture and English
  - Divide jobs into small parts so that the garden is not overwhelming. For example one classroom or parent can be in charge of the garden to cafeteria program. A different group could do farmers' markets or classroom activities.

- Use parents' special skills. Look for people who are good communicators, good fundraisers or who have garden or construction skills
- Host family friendly events in the garden

2. Build diverse ways of communicating that are based on your specific needs.

- *Communicating with the neighborhood*
  - Build extensive email list to keep people up to date with successes, needs and events.
- *Communicating with parents*
  - Sandwich boards and school marquee
  - Thursday packets and flyers
  - Quick email blasts for last minute help
  - School newsletters
  - School website
  - Word of mouth
  - Parents will want to participate if their children are enthusiastic and learning
  - Send seeds, recipes and projects home
  - Have parents mentor each other
- *Communicating with teachers*
  - Staff meetings
  - Use online tools like SignUp Genius for classes
  - Get a mailbox in the office for the garden
  - Make a map of the garden so everyone knows what is planted
  - Use caution tape to mark plots that have already been planted
  - Use signs to indicate if a crop is ready for harvest

Gardens can be used for a wide variety of programs and events, including:

- Work days can be "family fun" days in the garden
- Summer literacy programs
- Earth day celebration, part of school wide celebrations
- After School Club
- Green Team Club
- Spring and Fall Garden Clean up Days
- Literacy in the Garden
- Let students be the guides for their parents and community members
- Celebration of Cultures, international potluck, dance and song