

Guidelines for Working with SD8 Operations Dept to Create School Gardens

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1. Before anything is done at the school, call Bruce or Garth and arrange to have a meeting with them to discuss your plans. The importance of this step cannot be overstated!
2. Once you have an idea and have talked with the Operations Dept, draft a ½ page letter to the District outlining your project and plans. Include time lines, contact people for the project and ensure student involvement. This letter will go to the Operations Dept and the Union to ensure that all parties are aware of the planned activities. It is important that the Operations Dept is notified if there are any changes to the original plans. A main contact person or two must be identified.
3. The roles and responsibilities of the parents, teachers, volunteers and CUPE should be clearly defined before any work goes ahead. A member of the SD8 Operations crew must be on site to work with volunteer parents while construction of gardens is taking place (including any use of electrical tools). Use of electrical tools by students will be limited depending on the group at the school ie: a woodworking class with a teacher.
4. In order to respect Union agreements, any equipment or trades that are already in place at the SD8 Operations Dept will not be allowed to be donated by the group who are volunteering their time to work on the garden. For example, SD8 has a plumber and an excavator and therefore an excavator owned by a parent cannot be brought to the site or a parent plumber cannot volunteer his/her time to work in that trade at the site.
5. Work with the SD8 Operations staff must be done during regular working hours, not on weekends or evenings. SD8 Operations have a limited staff and will not be readily available to be onsite at any time. Plans and arrangements must be made with the Operations Dept well ahead of time for these purposes and there is no guarantee that staff will be available at any time. Summer is the busiest time of year for the Operations Dept.
6. Activities like shoveling soil, planting, etc, are fine to be done without SD8 on site. Garden boxes can be made off site and brought onsite and put in place. SD8 staff will not be involved with any of the actual gardening activities.
7. Any costs for water systems, lumber, soil, landscape paper, etc, will be the responsibility of the group organizing the project, not the SD8 Operations Dept.

8. Discussions regarding type of wood for garden boxes and other materials to be used for gardening must be discussed with the Operations Dept heads.
9. Student involvement is very important to reduce vandalism. Students take more ownership and have more appreciation in the work involved in the project when they are active participants.
10. Grass cutting is the only thing that SD8 Operations do with regards to landscape maintenance in the summer months. They will not garden, weed or water. It is important that the location and shape of the gardens not interfere unduly with grass-cutting and maneuverability of the sit down mowers. There are only three staff to cut the grass at all 23 schools, so their time is very limited.
11. Education of the responsibilities involved in gardening is very important. Some schools have installed composters which have since been removed by SD8 when no one takes responsibility and cares for it throughout the school year. Sustainability of gardening is important and training of parents with children in younger grades as well as students is critical to ensure the gardening continues annually.
12. There are some issues with safety and visibility regarding vines growing up fences. Any plans to have things grow on fences that may restrict visibility into the school yard should be discussed with the SD8 Operations Dept.
13. SD8 Operations Dept can provide a site map and irrigation plans for schools to begin their design process. Rooftop gardens and ponds will not be allowed.
14. The custodian at the school is not responsible for any of the gardening duties including weeding, watering, cleaning up messes made while students were gardening, etc.
15. If SD8 Operations finds that changes need to be made to the garden, they will notify the contact person for the group before any changes are made to the gardens. If things are done incorrectly, then SD8 will notify the group and give them notice before changes are made by district staff.
16. Any questions should be directed to Bruce MacLean or Garth Allen (contact information at the top of the sheet).
17. SD 8 has experienced many cutbacks in recent years, and the Operations Dept has been hard hit. Although they support garden projects and school greening in principle, they are generally not in a position to donate materials, though they may contribute labour, depending on demand and availability and the extent of work required.
18. Student involvement is also helpful if/when there might be concerns about volunteerism vs. union labour. If a project can be shown to be educational, and the students are truly involved in a meaningful way (e.g., painting a mural on a wall, as opposed to just painting a wall), then it is less likely to be contentious.

19. Irrigation: Underground and/or automated (e.g., drip) irrigation is encouraged by the District, but will have to be paid for by the school/PAC/garden committee. District staff will be responsible for turning on the water in the spring, turning it off in the fall, and blowing out the pipes.

20. During the school year, students should water the garden. This is a job they love, and it helps them stay in touch with how the garden changes from week to week. Through the summer, however, it is important that watering not be left to volunteers, because it is too hard on the plants if somebody forgets to come water them, and the system will not be sustainable over the long run.

21. Summertime: It is helpful if you can give Operations and Maintenance some contact names and numbers over the summer, in case they notice something going wrong at the gardens (e.g., automatic irrigation not coming on; composter smelling; plants growing out of control...)