

Green Space Romeo

Appendix C:

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

www.GreenSpaceRomeo.org

The property at 297 Prospect Street has great potential as an educational resource for the teachers at Romeo Community Schools (RCS). Green Space Romeo (GSR) appreciates the RCS Board of Education Policy¹, which notes that *“The Board recognizes the importance of community input and encourages active involvement in School District planning and operations.”* Our two experienced educators on the Green Space Romeo Board of Directors, Kimberly Voss and Kristin Brewer, are ready to launch this involvement by connecting green space with curriculum standards in consultation with other educators in the community, including current teachers within our school district. The educational opportunities of green space are relevant, not only to the Green Space on Prospect Street project, but to other green space resources throughout the community.

Green Space as an Educational Resource

GSR has developed a site proposal that we are prepared to implement through a combination of volunteer commitment, future grant funding, and community partnerships. At a minimum, Green Space on Prospect will provide space for school classes and clubs to gather. However, our plans for the site can and will involve input from local educators and are open to revision based on the needs of RCS.

In our proposal, we highlight the MI State Content Standards² and Essential Elements³ for students who receive special education services. These educational standards/elements and goals can be tailored to meet the needs of both general and special education students, from pre-school through transition age. We embrace the prerogative of educators to design curriculum and offer attached documents with the selected educational standards and sample goals only as examples of potential curricular applications to be gained through Green Space on Prospect Street and our

Contents

Educational Opportunities

- Green Space as an Educational Resource
 - Addressing the Needs of Special Education Students with Green Space
- I. Selected Content Standards
 - A. English Literature Arts
 - B. Math
 - C. Science
 - D. Social Studies
 - II. Selected Essential Elements
 - A. English Language Arts
 - B. Math
 - C. Science
 - D. Social Studies

¹ Romeo Community Schools Board of Education Bylaws and Policies. 3/31/2022. Section 7000 - School-Community Relations, Item 7001 Goal (page 31).

https://romeok12.org/downloads/employee_services/romeo_policy_manual-u_8.2.2022.pdf

² <https://www.michigan.gov/mde/services/academic-standards>

³ <https://www.michigan.gov/mde/services/student-assessment/mi-access/training/essential-elements-with-michigan-range-of-complexity>

non-profit organization. The attached documents also demonstrate that we are ready to work hard to support our community and its learning needs.

While we look forward to supporting learning for all students across the core for all three levels, we also look forward to collaborating with high school and middle school staff to specifically enhance the academy pathways program. GSR hopes to establish a non-profit partnership with Romeo Middle School as middle school staff work to build an Academy Pathways model in cooperation with non-profits that will instill a service spirit among the students. GSR will offer teachers and students experiences related to non-profit organization and management, make internships for students possible, and also support a Junior Master Gardener's Program. A working relationship with the high school staff will enhance the Career Pathways program already in place. Just think about the possibilities for entrepreneurship, innovation, hospitality, and construction, as well as health, public service and public safety. Additionally, GSR can provide another option for the high school's service-oriented S.E.R.V.E program. The credit opportunity S.E.R.V.E makes possible can be supported by our talented and diverse membership and we look forward to supporting the S.E.R.V.E coordinator.

GSR proposes to offer experiences to enhance the high-quality educational product that RCS currently provides and that this experience will mean an engaging, relevant, real-world, authentic learning experience for all students for many years to come.

Addressing the Needs of Special Education Students with Green Space

The use of a community and school garden provides multiple opportunities for learning activities that are meaningful, engaging, relevant, inclusive and fun. In addition to using the garden to address Michigan State Content Standards and Essential Elements, special education teachers and staff can address Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals under multiple categories; address transition goals for students ages 16-26; provide vocational training for older students; and provide experiences for collaborative and inclusive activities involving both special education and general education students.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), "Disability inclusion means including people with disabilities in everyday activities and encouraging them to have roles similar to their peers without disabilities. Inclusion should lead to increased participation in socially expected life roles and activities. This requires communities and organizations to put adequate policies and practices in effect." Green Space Romeo is uniquely situated to be able to collaborate with the Romeo Schools and other community organizations to take a leading role in providing inclusive opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities.

Gardening is known to provide many advantages, including physical, mental, and social. These benefits can enhance the educational experience of students in both general and special education. They can also be enjoyed by community members of all ages, including those with disabilities (mental, physical, and/or intellectual) and people of all ages seeking connection with the community and nature. Activities can be planned year-round and can include garden design, soil preparation, planting seeds, tending to plants, harvesting and using produce/flowers/herbs, creating garden-related crafts in the winter, planting terrariums in the winter, germinating seeds indoors prior to spring, and working a compost pile, just to name a few.

Our vision for this property includes honoring many uses, including recreational, historical, educational, and natural preservation. Our design will comply with accessibility standards, so that people of all ages and abilities will be able to access the property and all the benefits. Although we love the concept of getting kids into nature and off their phones, we recognize the role that technology can play in enhancing the experience and accessibility and plan to utilize interactive technology as part of the design.

Green Space Romeo recognizes and honors the agency that educators have to design their own learning activities and tailor goals to the specific needs of their students who may have a variety of qualifying disabilities, such as autism, ADHD, anxiety, intellectual disability, learning disability, speech disability, physical disability, emotional disability, vision/hearing, and more. Here we provide examples of goals that can be implemented via gardening and green space for students receiving special education services, including but not limited to:

Executive Functioning

Executive Functioning skills such as self-awareness, task initiation, flexibility, organization, planning, self-monitoring, time management:

1. Given a list of potential triggers that might be found in a garden (i.e. insects, dirt) student will identify which triggers are likely to cause upset and make a plan for how to deal with the trigger if encountered.
2. Given support and visual cues, the student will create a system for organizing personal items in their gardening work bucket.
3. Given training and practice with the concept of compromise, and in the presence of visual supports, the student will accept and generate compromise solutions to conflicts when working cooperatively with others.
4. The student will utilize a visual or printed checklist to complete a garden task such as planting a seed correctly.

Self-Regulation

Self-Regulation skills, such as impulse control, improved focus, stress management, and appropriate emotional expression:

1. When presented with a problem (non-preferred task, frustrating situation, criticism/correction), the student will accurately determine the size of the problem (big problem, medium problem, small problem) and determine the appropriate emotional response (take a break, talk with the teacher, take a deep breath, replace frustration with good thoughts, etc.) to be able to return to the task.

Social

Social Skills, including teamwork, collaboration/cooperation, active listening, conversation skills, and the opportunity to make friends:

1. During collaborative tasks, the student will actively contribute ideas and listen to others' suggestions without exhibiting disruptive behaviors.

2. The student will initiate conversations or interactions with classmates at least once per day during gardening activities or unstructured social times.
3. The student will correctly interpret and respond to nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and body language demonstrated by peers in various social situations.
4. The student will actively participate in discussions and planning sessions by contributing relevant ideas, asking questions, and responding to peers' contributions.
5. The student will demonstrate active listening by maintaining eye contact, nodding in acknowledgment, paraphrasing peers' statements during conversations.

Occupational Therapy

Occupational Therapy goals, such as fine motor, balance, and sensory regulation

1. The student will use their dominant hand and safely grasp child-sized or adapted garden shears, to cut a flower off the stem.
2. To reduce tactile sensitivity in a child with sensory processing challenges, the child will engage with different textures such as soil, leaves, and grass.

Physical Therapy

Physical Therapy goals, including mobility, balance, strength, endurance, muscle tone, and coordination

1. To increase endurance, the student will participate in group activity of pulling weeds for at least 15 minutes.
2. To enhance functional mobility, the student will independently navigate from the parking lot to the garden plot.

Speech Therapy

Speech Therapy goals, such as vocabulary, sentence structure, conversational skills, requesting items or activities, responding to questions, requesting basic needs

1. After engaging in a structured garden activity, the student will use sequence words to verbally order and re-tell an event (e.g. first, next, then, after that, last).
2. During a gardening activity with a variety of peers, the student will use their augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device to link subject, verb, and noun to create a simple sentence.

As seen from the above examples, gardening and nature activities for students with special needs offer a huge variety of benefits, including social, educational, psychological, and physical. Public gardens and green spaces can and should be designed for access by persons of all abilities. Green Space Romeo is excited to continue the long-standing tradition of educational excellence at 297 Prospect Street and to have the opportunity to co-create a space that will enhance the lives of ALL residents for generations to come.