

Greening Your Policies

Your district's "green" efforts can be helped along by your policy manual

By DAVID BOSTED

The arrival of spring—at long last—shines a spotlight on the environmental policies of school districts. Your district no doubt has a policy on safe use of pesticides (“Integrated Pest Management”) and probably has other “green” policies, such as safe storage of hazardous materials. But beyond the minimum, what opportunities are available in the area of “green” policies?

School garden policies “School gardens” is an important area. The cover story in this issue is about the spread of community-supported school gardens around the state (see page 18). This is a national trend, not just a New Jersey one. California is the undisputed leader on agriculture and school gardens. The California State Department of Education has issued this policy statement on the topic: “The Garden in Every School Program promotes linkages among the school classroom, school cafeteria, local agriculture, waste management, and others.” New Jersey, the Garden State, has every incentive to live up to its nickname and to promote a garden at every school.

New Jersey School Boards Association files the topic of “school gardens” at #3508 in the Critical Policy Reference Manual. This is adjacent to other topics about school buildings and grounds. The Association has several good sample policies on school gardens. The sample policy appears on the next page. Board members can e-mail the Legal & Policy Services Department for digital copies of it.

As always, school boards can use their policies to create a vision of what they want to see in their district. The broad policy can be supplemented with in-depth regulations. For gardens, the details can be many, and each district must decide for itself how specific it wants to



be. For example, the sample policy notes that “consideration will be given to created raised bed gardens that include sections for herbs, garden vegetables, flowering garden plants that bloom while school is in session, a small composting area and a small cold frame to extend the growing season of the garden.”

Most school gardens are small. Even for a small garden, you will need a vision, a design and a system for directing the planting and maintenance. When you decide on the details, place them in a regulation so that your policy is uncluttered, clear and inspirational.

How do you get the ball rolling? Governance is in the hands of the school board. At a minimum, a board member would make a motion to encourage or start a school garden, and another board member would second the motion. If a majority of board members can be con-

vinced that a school garden is a good idea, you are on your way. It is the same with policy on school gardens. One member makes a motion to adopt policy, another will second the motion.

Some districts and charter schools have created school gardens without a vote or a policy. If the superintendent is focused on the desirability of having a garden, it can be done very simply. One charter school in Trenton was allocated space to plant a garden on the sunny back lot of a nearby public library. The chief school administrator took charge and made the garden happen. Arguably, urban children will derive an even greater benefit than others, because they may not have access to a garden at home. The sample policy has this provision: “Each school garden shall be under the direction of one or more individuals from school staff or the community, designated by the superintendent.”

Other topics with environmental implications that are suitable for policy are (1) Energy, energy audit and energy conservation activities at #3500.1, (2) Operation and Maintenance of Plant at #3510, including recycling, and (3) the entire 7000-series, covering Construction, Remodeling and Renovation of school facilities.

NJSBA is always seeking additional sample policies from New Jersey districts. If you have a good model policy to share on any environmental topic, we are only an e-mail away. (Send sample policies to dbosted@njsba.org) We will place your policy in our Policy Clearinghouse files and distribute it to other districts upon their request. **sl**

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<u> X </u>	Monitored
<u> X </u>	Mandated
<u> </u>	Other Reasons

SCHOOL GARDENS

The School Board encourages and supports the development of school gardens. New Jersey is called "The Garden State." School gardens can help students learn about nutrition and healthy eating. Therefore, school buildings and grounds shall include provision for school gardens.

The chief school administrator may develop detailed plans and regulations for the safe and efficient operation and maintenance of gardens on school grounds. Each school garden shall be under the direction of one or more individuals from school staff or the community, designated by the superintendent.

Benefits of School Gardens

Our local school garden is part of a nationwide rediscovery of gardening as a tool for hands-on, student-centered learning. School gardens benefit classrooms and students by:

- Addressing multiple learning styles/opportunities concerning:
- Plant growth and other natural processes;
- Tools and their proper use;
- Where food comes from;
- Teaching patience and responsibility;
- Teaching students to work cooperatively;
- Focus on educational topics:
- Promoting garden foods and good nutrition;
- Improving environmental awareness;
- Demonstrate best practice sustainable design;
- The value of compost as a soil supplement, plus reducing landfill disposal of waste;
- Link farm to school, in the Garden State;
- Saving money while improving nutrition;
- The role of phytochemicals and beneficial effects:
- Against inflammation;
- Oxidative stress;
- Cancer; and
- Cardiovascular disease.
- Increasing physical activity;
- Building classroom relationships and school spirit;
- Improving social skills, socializing;
- Creating an appreciation for team work;
- Increasing self-esteem and self-worth.
- Supporting interdisciplinary education;
- Serving as an outdoor science lab to teach about:
- Seed germination;
- Composting;
- The life cycle of plants;
- Pollination and the parts of a flower.
- Beautifying the school environment.

Integration of the School Gardens into the Curriculum

Integrate eating experiences, gardens, and nutrition education into the curriculum for math, science, social studies and language arts at all grade level;

Establish a school garden in every school. Give students the opportunity to plant, harvest, prepare, cook and eat food they have grown;

Establish relationships with local farms. Encourage farmers and farm workers to come to the school for classroom talks and arrange for students to visit farms.

Community Support and Participation

The board encourages community participation in creating and maintaining the school gardens. Community participation will be consistent with policies #1230, "School connected organizations" and #1200 "Volunteers."

Location and Design

The location and design of each school garden will be approved by the Superintendent, the school principal and the director of buildings and grounds. Special consideration will be given to access to clean water (or stored rainwater), good drainage, storage of tools, sunny orientation, blockage of harsh winds from the north and northwest, beautification of school grounds,

access by students, and student safety. The garden design will promote accessibility and will include some seating.

Consideration will be given to creating raised bed gardens that include sections for herbs, garden vegetables, flowering garden plants that bloom while school is in session, a small composting area, and a small cold-frame to extend the growing season of the garden.

Poster contest

The district will sponsor a student poster contest, annually or as circumstances permit, to illustrate the beneficial aspects of the school gardens, with awards. The posters will be displayed in appropriate locations, in recognition of the artistic efforts of the students who create the posters.

DATE:

Legal References: Use legal reference sheet.

Cross References: List your appropriate policies. See legal reference sheet for possibilities.

KEY WORDS

Operation and Maintenance of Plant, Buildings and Grounds, Maintenance, School-connected organizations, Ad Hoc committees, Volunteers/participation of the public