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KA committee plans student gardening program for spring

Under the blanket of powdery-fresh snow there is life waiting to wake up. And while it rests the Knowlton Academy garden committee has started firming up and tweaking plans for the first phase of the program announced last autumn.



ANN DAVIDSON

Jana Vaselek, parent of a Knowlton Academy student and TBL librarian, looks over the most recent illustrations prepared by landscape architect Susan Muir, while teacher Annie Butler and Shelley Mizener, the mastermind of the Greenhouse and Garden Project, field questions and suggestions at last week's planning meeting.

A meeting was held last Friday with the grassroots organization whose mission is to develop a program that promotes sustainable healthy life management. Bringing gardening and nutritional education to the existing curriculum at Knowlton Academy dovetails perfectly with the agricultural nature of the region. It will also allow students to separate digital/electronic time to connect with the natural environment.

It is the committee's hope to establish an interactive, intergenerational, all-inclusive program that integrates the curriculum, include the community, and allow for sustainability in a hands-on experience with the natural environment. It is also the hopes of Knowlton Academy to develop a farm-to-table

model that teaches students how to grow and prepare their own food that other schools in the region could foster.

The intent of the organizing committee is to include students with every facet of the program, from planning, to planting, growing, harvesting and preparing their bounty. By creating a user's committee students will be given the opportunity to provide the organizers with important feedback and new ideas. The goal is for them to become more prepared to sustain themselves as they grow up. By co-creating with the elders of the community during the hands-on learning process the students will be given the opportunity to learn about different plants and their needs, connect with Mother Nature, and develop local sustainability. The hope is to make an organic connection with existing establishments such as the library, museum, community gardens, and food bank. Added hidden benefits fall in line with mentoring, development of new and important intergenerational relationships, and socialization. And the step-by-step experiences can be applied to the development of countless other academic skills such as writing, reading, math, and science.

Landscape architect Susan Muir is deeply involved with the project and has already designed an exciting layout for the project. She feels that, "the students will also benefit from the harvest in the KA bistro program, where the literal 'fruits of their labour,' the bounty of their gardens, will be prepared for a communal feast. In this regard, the students can learn to understand and appreciate the value of home grown food, and learn how to include local produce in their home cooking."

By providing the medium to execute the program children will be taught the process of growing and harvesting food as well as its preparation in the kitchen. That the organizing committee wants to ensure that the program moves forward before the erection of a greenhouse, for this year the hope is to focus on cultivating produce in raised beds and containers. In that respect there will be a call out to all green thumbs for their volunteer expertise as well as any empty pots and containers that the students can use to get the planting started in the coming weeks. Of course donated other contributions of potting soil, tools, seeds, and other relevant items for the project will be appreciated. It is anticipated that each classroom will need to acquire grow lights.

A timetable for planting is being established for the actual project so that the students can start as early as March.

As Muir concludes, "Like the seeds with which we will grow our food, this project began as the seed of an idea, and through the communal efforts of many people from many different areas of expertise and experience, the Greenhouse and Garden Project will blossom into a wonderful place of learning and growth, where young and old alike can experience the sense of community and sustainability," reverberating the old saying that, "A community that sows together, grows together."

While a couple of fundraising events are in the early stages of organization, the committee anticipates presenting information at a special meeting within the next eight weeks.

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