Case Study: Engaging the teaching staff in the garden; by Barbara Nordstrom, Volunteer Elementary School Garden Coordinator.

At our school the children are always eager to come to the garden, but getting the teachers to take their classes to the garden is an issue. We discovered that if we can arrange for additional staff and supervision during garden sessions, the teachers are more likely to come. We coordinate with the teacher on the time, tasks, and talents that volunteers will need. We agree on the ratio of volunteers to students based on student age and task, or learning goals. The expectations need to be clear; will the teacher be doing the teaching with the volunteers assisting, or are you or another volunteer expected to teach a unit of the prescribed curriculum according to the guidelines? How will the volunteers assist, and what are the learning goals and expectations for the students?

A recent example at Hazel Dell Elementary; second grade teachers wanted to do a cumulative soil unit in the garden, including the planting of a seed to take home for Mother’s Day. The prospective volunteers met with the teachers, after school, in the garden to discuss the particulars; where in the garden students would meet, how the soil would be distributed, how deep to plant the seed, how to water the soil, where the garden key would be, what supplies would be needed, and who would get them to the garden. The teachers’ expectation for student behavior and classroom management was also discussed.

Additional discussion topics might include school district requirements on volunteer background checks, and communicating the district’s photo policy to volunteers.

After the soil unit event, comments and suggestion were requested from the teachers and volunteers so that a future garden visit can be even better.