

Benedict A. Cucinella Elementary School

470 Naughtright Road, Long Valley, NJ 07853

"Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much." – Helen Keller

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To Whom It May Concern,

Benedict A. Cucinella Elementary School is looking to create a raised bed garden in our school's outdoor courtyard in an effort to cultivate inclusivity. Our school currently houses three school-aged self-contained classrooms that serve students with various learning needs in Kindergarten through fifth grade. Students within these programs may have autism spectrum disorder, communications impairment, or a specific learning disability which requires them to be instructed in a small group setting for the majority of the day. These students attend specials, lunch and recess with their grade level peers, but often view themselves as guests within the general classroom setting.

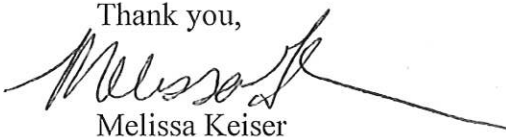
Through the Cultivating Inclusivity project, we will provide our special education students with ongoing opportunities to become our school's gardening experts and to share their knowledge with their peers, fostering their leadership skills and increasing the interaction between our general education students and the students in our self-contained classrooms. Additionally, the students will gain knowledge about where their food comes from while simultaneously nurturing life skills such as responsibility and problem solving as they take on full ownership of our courtyard gardens.

The produce grown within our raised bed gardens will be used as teaching tools to expose our students to new foods and reinforce healthy choices. Any food items beyond what would be used in the classrooms can be utilized in our school cafeterias and/or donated to the local food pantry.

Our overall goal is to plant three vegetable beds that are accessible to all students, including those with any sensory issues or physical needs. An additional garden to attract pollinators will also be planted, and a bird bath will serve as a water source for the pollinators.

We truly believe that the positive outcomes and benefits of this project will far outweigh the costs of bringing the gardens to life within our courtyard and will have a life-long effect on our students. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions you may have regarding our Cultivating Inclusivity project.

Thank you,



Melissa Keiser