

Green Bay West High School's Multicultural Garden

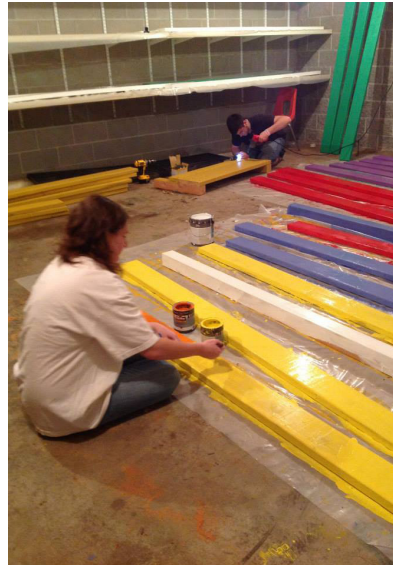


E-ben Grisby wanted his students to know that you don't have to fit a stereotype to do organic gardening. A year later, he has helped student leaders at Green Bay's West High School create a garden that debunks pre-conceived notions about who can grow good food, or what that food should be.

The school's garden highlights foods from many of the cultural traditions represented among West High students, 30-40% of whom identify as non-white. Students and faculty worked together to brainstorm some of the major foods eaten in different cultural traditions, and created garden beds to represent each. "It's not to stereotype any of the foods in terms of where it belongs," Grisby remarked, "We want students to know that these foods are not limited to these communities, but also give them a sense of which foods contribute most to the different diets."

The multicultural beds include a Three Sisters Garden of corn, beans and squash that was blessed by Oneida Nation representatives from the area before planting, as well as a Soul Garden that contains vegetables common among African American and pan-African communities – things like cabbages, collards, okra, and eggplant. The Salsa Garden contains tomatoes, peppers, and other foods used commonly in Latino communities while the Golden Garden features bok choy, peas, and a variety of coAn Oneida Nation member assists with the Three Sisters Garden planting. oking greens used commonly in area Asian communities. The garden also supports LGBT students and community members with its Rainbow raised bed of colorful chard, red and green cabbages, and different colored peppers.

The garden goes hand in hand with the Diversity Club that Grisby advises, and many students are involved in both. "The Diversity Club really tries to engage students to understanding themselves as a part of the community, using their



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own culture as an asset,” Grisby said.

West, which tends to have an open environment between different student groups, is using its garden to help students engage with the wider community as well. Last year, student leaders arranged a plant sale and sold vegetables at the school to help support the garden. Summer school students sold produce at a farmer’s market and donated food to local pantries.

Grisby described the area around West as a food desert, with more access to fast foods than nutritious foods. “I don’t think our kids understood the process from plant to plate,” he said. “With the garden, they are involved from start to finish. We have a huge greenhouse that we were in jeopardy of losing before we started the garden – now the seedlings our students started there should be transplanted to the garden in just a couple of weeks.”

In addition to Grisby, the garden is led by a core group of student as well as and two school social workers who are particularly invested in bringing in foods that meet the needs of some of the different cultures on West’s campus.

“It’s interesting to see how the commonalities between the different cultures can play a big role in our overall health and wellbeing,” said Grisby, who has noticed that many students who used to have a very limited view of palatable vegetables – or a total aversion to them – are much more willing to try new things since getting involved with the garden. “It’s kind of like breaking them out of their comfort zone and demystifying the big role foods play in different cultures.”

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