



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 15 LAUNCHES GARDEN TRAIN, A DISTRICT-WIDE SCHOOL GARDENS CONSORTIUM

NEW YORK, November 30, 2017 -- Community Education Council District 15 (CEC15) has launched Garden Train, a District 15 School Gardens Consortium, with support from Grow to Learn, the citywide school gardens initiative. No other district-focused school gardens consortium exists in New York City yet, but Garden Train hopes to lead the way for other districts. Founded by CEC15 Co-Vice President Kathy Park Price with the backing of her CEC15 colleagues, Garden Train's mission is to grow community. Brooklyn's public school gardens, led by parents and teachers, have the unique ability of growing our connections not only with nature, but our connections with each other. Garden Train is a public, community-based group that welcomes all and exists to better serve our students and their families.

The kickoff, or sprouting meeting, took place on November 27 at Brooklyn Public Library's Central branch. Welcome remarks were given by Assemblymembers Jo Anne Simon and Robert Carroll, and Councilmember Brad Lander's education liaison Vicki Sell. The event was well-attended by the school garden leaders from the District 15 neighborhoods: Boerum Hill, Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, Fort Greene, Gowanus, Kensington, Park Slope, Sunset Park and Red Hook. Additionally, community organizations and institutions represented at the meeting included: Brooklyn Public Library, Community Board 2, New York City Department of Education (DOE), Gowanus Canal Conservancy, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and Old Stone House & Washington Park (OSH).

A Garden Train Tool Lending Depot is the group's first project, which was proposed by Michele Israel, Founder, NYC Youth and School Garden Network, with support from Kim Maier, Executive Director, OSH. A storage repository will be housed at OSH for shared gardening equipment. Tools will be accessible two Saturdays per month, with planned programming focused on urban farming, composting, seed saving, pollinator plants, and other topical issues. The tool lending depot concept reinforces several of Garden Train's core values, including collaboration, sharing of resources and working closely with local community partners. The proposal has been submitted to Councilmember Brad Lander for participatory budget consideration. Other exciting Garden Train projects will be sprouting in the coming months.

Community support for Garden Train is already strong. Elected officials as well as other community leaders shared their thoughts about the value that Garden Train brings to Brooklyn:

Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon said, "School gardens are fertile ground for learning from and learning to respect others. They encourage students to work together, building understanding, empathy, communication, and tolerance by teaching kids how to cooperate with others and with nature. Garden Train is doing great work to build and support gardening programs at every school and strengthen the community."

Assemblymember Robert Carroll said, "I am thrilled to support Garden Train, a wonderful parent-led initiative from Community Education Council District 15. Our school gardens serve a very important role in our community, because they help give our children a hands-on appreciation for the beauty of the natural world right here in Brooklyn. I look forward to seeing the gardens grow over the coming year and stand ready to roll up my sleeves and assist in the planting!"

Vicki Sell, Education Liaison, Councilmember Brad Lander's office said, "District 15 is about groups of leaders coming together like this to make wonderful things happen. School gardens open the eyes of our students to healthy fresh food, stewardship of the earth and to shared community. Our office is really excited about Garden Train and we want to look for ways to be supportive."

Kristin Fields, Director, Grow to Learn said, "Grow to Learn is always proud to help schools start and expand existing gardens, whether it's on a windowsill or an empty lot, because gardens grow communities. Seeing

CEC15 band together to share best practices and resources is an exciting next step for Brooklyn's school garden community, and a model we hope other neighborhoods in our Grow to Learn network will consider as well."

District 15 Superintendent Anita Skop said, "So excited to have gardens blossoming at schools in District 15! Thank you to all of the parents and community organizations that are supporting this effort."

Claudia Joseph, Garden Educator, MS 51 & Old Stone House Partnership Gardens said, "Our potential for sharing materials, know-how and curriculum between school gardens will be greatly expanded, giving underserved communities the resources they need to succeed."

Stephanie Brueckel, Manager, Park Slope Library said, "I've seen firsthand the benefits a garden can have for our neighborhood's children. Brooklyn Public Library is proud to join with CEC15 and our schools to add more green spaces and environmental education programs to our community."

Kathy Park Price, Co-Vice President of CEC15 and Founder and Administrator, Garden Train said, "As a parent advocate and member of CEC15, we saw an opportunity to utilize our beloved school gardens as a vehicle for sharing best practices and mentoring across the district to make our schools better for all of our children and to grow community. If CEC15 can model this successfully with school gardens, what areas of our schools will benefit next?"

Arielle Hartman, School Gardens Coordinator, Grow to Learn and Supporting Partner, Garden Train said, "Garden Train represents the kind of sustainability that Grow to Learn nurtures through its work. Where Grow to Learn falls in after helping schools set up their own gardens is supporting groups like Garden Train. We want to hand over the ownership to the community leaders, teachers and parents, who have visions like this and fade to the background while groups like this take the reins."

Current Garden Buds, supporters of Garden Train, are:

Assemblymember Robert Carroll
Assemblymember Felix Ortiz
Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon
Brooklyn Public Library
Councilmember Brad Lander
Councilmember Stephen Levin
Councilmember Carlos Menchaca
Gotham Greens
Gowanus Canal Conservancy
Old Stone House & Washington Park
Public Advocate Letitia James

The Garden Train logo, created by designer Rob Price, is the words "Garden Train" in green accompanied by an image of a three-car train that can also be interpreted as a set of three container gardens of kale connected by irrigation tubes. The train image conveys that our gardens are connected and moving forward together. The word "train" can be understood as a powerful vehicle, but also as a metaphor for the learning that will take place among our garden leaders.

Garden Train is an example of parent engagement in our schools. CEC15, which is a state-mandated parent advocacy group independent of the DOE, represents the 35,000 public elementary and middle school students and their families of District 15. All eleven of the CEC15 members are parents of children in District 15. Garden Train is possible because of the partnership with city-funded Grow to Learn and our DOE partners, making the network a unique Parent-City initiative.

If you would like to be a Garden Train participant or Garden Bud (supporter), please reach out to kathyparkpriceCEC15@gmail.com and follow our Facebook page at facebook.com/GardenTrainD15. All aboard!

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