



Rothenberg Preparatory Academy Rooftop Garden

- **An Over-the-Rhine Foundation Initiative**

Over-the-Rhine Foundation is the only organization in the City of Cincinnati whose mission is largely focused on preserving and promoting OTR's livability and we have been doing this since 1992. Board members led the effort to save Rothenberg School from demolition. Since 2008 we have been spreading the word, telling the Rooftop Garden Story, and inspiring donors as we raised funds to build the Rooftop Garden. This historic neighborhood is currently enjoying a revival as businesses are relocating here, and historic buildings, such as Rothenberg School, are being reclaimed and restored. Cincinnati Public Schools renovated the historic school building, and re-opened to students beginning with the 2013-2014 academic year. The neighborhood is humming, and Rothenberg School, at the corner of Main Street and East McMillan Street, anchors the activity.

- **People Behind the Rothenberg School Academy Rooftop Garden**

Rothenberg Rooftop Project Manager Edwin "Pope" Coleman is an urban activist whose primary project of the last decade has been the reclamation, "greening," and re-opening of historic Rothenberg Preparatory Academy in Over-the-Rhine. Operating within the bounds of the Over-the-Rhine Foundation, Pope has worked to first save the school from the wrecking ball, and then to enlist Cincinnati Public Schools in embracing his vision for the Rothenberg roof teaching garden. Since 2008, establishing a roof garden atop Rothenberg School has been his goal, and he brought all his knowledge and experience in arts, business, design, and education to bear on this project. Because of his vision and his efforts, this school year, and every year after that, these inner city children will experience their academic curriculum through the hands-on-lens of garden learning.

Bryna Bass is the Rothenberg Rooftop Garden School Manager, a year-round position. A passionate educator with 17 years of experience, four specifically with Children, Inc. of Covington, KY, she has a dual role, serving Children, Inc. and onsite at Rothenberg daily. Bryna has been working with Rothenberg teachers and students since August 2013

In designing and operating the garden, the expertise of Green City Resources has been engaged. **Green City Resources is a Cincinnati-based green structure company** specializing in the design and installation of storm water management solutions; vegetated roofing; bioretention; native landscaping; rain water harvesting; and sustainable land use.

- **The Rooftop Garden School Program**

The Garden School teaching, which relies on twenty-five beds planted within the green roof of Rothenberg Academy, will help narrow the achievement gaps for the participating inner city children. Besides the integrated lesson plans in math, science, and language arts that correlate with the state academic standards, the Garden Teaching uses experiential learning opportunities that help students deepen their education while also providing a service to the community. Service Learning and the Integrated Garden Curriculum set the Rothenberg Rooftop Garden School apart from other garden teaching and other rooftop gardens.

Programming is conducted by Bryna Bass. She fulfills her responsibilities year-round. Bryna is the professional educator responsible for preparing, leading and cleaning up after each class's lesson in the garden. She develops lesson plans

and calendars, taking into account the needs of Zone 6 gardens and the timing of the classroom curriculum, pairing activities and lesson guides that are relevant to each of the grades at Rothenberg -- and overall garden maintenance and updating the lessons yearly as standards are revised at the state level.

The Rooftop Garden is more than growing things; it's more than the children getting their hands dirty -- it is an innovative model in which academic standards required at each grade level are integrated thoroughly with garden-based lessons. The Rothenberg Rooftop Garden serves as a community gathering place and a point of pride in this historic inner city neighborhood. Lessons in sustainability and container gardening will be taught across the generations and help advance the community as a whole toward better nutrition, more healthy ways of eating, and close-to-the source food production.

- **Program Need**

The Rothenberg Rooftop Garden School addresses the following needs, particular to the OTR children and the neighborhood we serve:

- Need for inner city children to engage with the natural environment first-hand to realize the importance of preservation and conservation, as well as issues of nutrition, healthy eating, and sustainability.

- Need to address problems such as childhood obesity and early onset diabetes, by promoting healthy eating habits.

- Need for successful and cost-effective intervention among low income children that will raise their educational outcomes.

- Need to develop among our children 21st century skills like teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and innovation — these form the foundation of both Service Learning and experiential Garden Teaching.

- Need to guide children to become good environmental citizens, and provide hands-on, problem solving learning opportunities for them.

- Need to enact change in our children, our community and our culture to promote community engagement from which all benefit; promote individual responsibility to our communities and to the planet; thereby building a positive future for the OTR neighborhood and its residents.

Program Impact

This program will help narrow the achievement gaps for the participating inner city children by using hands-on gardening as an integrator for discipline specific learning. This outcome will be determined via classroom achievement, test scores, Ohio Report Card “grades,” and grade promotion. Rothenberg teachers and administrators will maintain these statistics, as all CPS teachers and administrators do across the district.

Over the projected 30 year lifetime of the garden we estimate 16,500 or more needy inner city children and their families will be educated and served. The Rothenberg Rooftop Garden School will educate and influence 550 Rothenberg School children annually and into the future, as well as their families, teachers, school administrators and OTR community members.

The Rooftop Garden School addresses the need for inner city children to engage with the natural environment first-hand to realize the importance of preservation and conservation, as well as issues of nutrition, healthy eating, and sustainability. We take garden-based education further, by integrating weekly garden lesson plans in math, science, and language arts that correlate with state academic standards. This is the unduplicated impact our Rooftop Garden School offers Rothenberg children and their community.

Along with their acquiring nutrition knowledge and healthy eating habits, studies show positive relationships between gardening, math, science and literacy skills. Also important is society’s need to address problems such as childhood obesity and early onset diabetes, by promoting healthy eating habits, and also guiding children to become good environmental citizens, and providing hands-on, problem solving learning opportunities for them. Studies since the 1980's have argued that over-stimulating sights and sounds of urban areas require a cognitive effort that actually damages the brain; immersion in nature has a restorative effect, then, for these inner city children.

Additionally, through Service Learning activities associated with the Rothenberg Rooftop Garden School, we can:

- Facilitate better learning for students;
- Provide free resources to engage students and improve their educational outcomes; and
- Create a culture of care where all citizens are active members of their community.

- **Program Collaborations**

We are extremely proud of the combined effort and vision directed to the planning and development of the Rothenberg Rooftop Garden School since 2008. This project evolved from a team planning process, totally community-driven from its inception, and it falls within the parameters of CPS's Community Learning Center program, a model that has gained national attention from educators, public administrators, and government officials who note the advantages of a collaborative approach in serving the community. Through the Community Learning Centers concept, the school acts as a hub, or home base, for services which could be related to education, health, finance, skills training, the arts and more. It is the center of a vibrant, engaged group of stakeholders, all responding to the needs of the children, their families and their community.

Our Rooftop Garden School and the Rooftop Garden itself operate at Rothenberg as guests of the Cincinnati Public Schools. While we have the support and enthusiasm of CPS, we are at the school at their invitation and they are not responsible for the Rooftop Garden's funding of construction nor either construction nor operations. We have assembled a Garden Guild whose Board members and Guild members are supporters of this amazing project. They are community residents, parents, CPS Administrators and Facilities Personnel, OTR Foundation Liaison, rooftop garden experts, educators, gardeners, and more. Guild members act as advisory stewards for the Garden, its upkeep and maintenance, and the manner in which it will weave into the fabric of the community. (more about the Guild under "Who will Administer the Grant?")

Greg Landsman, Executive Director of STRIVE, as well as Sean Kelley and other members of the Greater Cincinnati STEM Collaborative (GCSC) Core Team have toured the Rooftop Garden site and are enthusiastically supportive of the project. The rooftop garden experience at Rothenberg enriches and supports all classroom core content, including the 3rd grade reading focus. It also contributes to other school preparedness initiatives. Two of our Rothenberg Rooftop Garden Guild members work with STRIVE.

- **Project Timeline**

- -2008: Rothenberg School saved from wrecking ball
- -4th Quarter 2008: Fundraising for Rooftop Garden School begins
- -2011: Elevator to roof installed (OTR Foundation Project, not CPS)
- -2011-2013 -- \$24 million restoration of historic Rothenberg Academy (CPS Project)
- -July 2013: Rothenberg Rooftop Garden School Manager hired (Bryna Bass)
- -August 2013: Rothenberg Academy re-opens for students and teachers
- -July 2013–present: Rooftop Garden Manager planning with teachers and principal; teaching garden learning in classrooms as requested by teachers and lesson plans
- -August 2013: Rooftop Garden Guild formed
- -February 2014: Rothenberg Rooftop Garden LLC established
- -May 2014: Rooftop Garden construction and installation
- -May 2014-future: Planting and garden operations with the students on the roof begins 4th quarter 2013-2014 school year, thereafter a continuous program integrating academic curriculum with hands-on learning in the garden

In our opinion, each one of these is a Key Milestone, hard fought and hard won.