

Cultivating Peace and Community in West Oakland

Paulina Tarr

June 2022

Oakland, USA

Background:

Hoover Elementary school in West Oakland, USA, is located less than 5 miles away from the International House at UC Berkeley. Yet, there are stark differences between the environment and resources that the communities of UC Berkeley and West Oakland have access to. West Oakland is highly diverse with strong African American and Latinx histories but has also been subject to decades of racist policies that separate the communities of color from access to nature, healthy foods, housing security, and other resources. As a result, many families struggle and the population of Hoover Elementary reflects the community they are in. 100% of the 268 students, aged five through eleven, have a low enough socioeconomic status to qualify for free or subsidized school lunches. For context, to qualify for free school meals, a family of four must make less than \$34,000 a year.

The demographics of Hoover Elementary reflect the strong African American roots of the area, but also show the increasing diversification of the community which in recent years has become increasingly international. The student population is 50% Latinx, 28% Black, 10% SWANA (Southwest-Asian-North-African/ Arabic), and 3% Mixed Race. Students' first languages include Spanish (43.7%), English (41%), Arabic (12.7%), Mam (.7%), and Kurdish, Tigrinya, Urdu, Other (.4% each). 13% of the students are newcomers, meaning that they arrived in the United States less than 3 years ago. While located domestically, this community is as international as the residents of the International House at UC Berkeley.

The West Oakland and Hoover communities face many barriers. The many who have recently immigrated to the area face even high barriers to accessing resources due to language barrier and lack of support. Environmentally racist policies have also created high levels of air pollution that have dire effects on young children and others. Children under 5 in West Oakland are 1.5 times more likely to be taken to the emergency room for severe asthma than the rest of Alameda County and the life expectancy is 7.5 years less.¹ It is clear that the relationship between the Earth and the international communities of West Oakland must be healed.

Project description:

Hoover Elementary school is home to a small, yet dearly loved community garden. In a neighborhood lacking in green spaces, this garden is a beautiful gift for those that visit and give time and energy to helping the garden grow. When you give to the garden, the garden will always give to you, and teachers and volunteers run it to share with all members of the community. While the garden is already a peaceful and safe space, increasing the resources and educational programming in it would help its healing abilities reach more community members and spread knowledge that would help young children create and nurture relationships to the Earth and the plants and creatures within it and also help adults heal that relationship that may be fractured.

For the Summer of 2022, I propose a series of summer camp days on Saturdays (June 4th and 11th) for Hoover Elementary Students at the garden, culminating in a large-scale community garden day near Juneteenth (June 18th). The camp days would serve to help connect the students with nature through

planting, storytimes, hands-on activities, art, and simply playing in nature and connecting with their community. Juneteenth is a holiday that celebrates the emancipation of enslaved African Americans and African American Culture and it would be a great opportunity for the community to come together around the garden. Each day of the camp would be themed with two potential days centering on food justice and plants from around the world.

Summer camp days would be half-day, beginning with a healthy breakfast and a full morning of fun, educational activities in the garden. Camp days would end with a hearty and healthy lunch. Camp days will also act as food distribution centers, providing free food to the families of the campers and any and all community members who are food insecure. Educational programming would be developed in more detail by myself (a future teacher and biology major), Kate Sbani (A veteran Hoover Elementary teacher), Wanda Stewart (an experienced garden teacher and advocate), as well as other community members and teachers.

Throughout the garden camp days, teachers and campers would plant two or three trees from around the world in the garden and learn about plants outside of the Bay Area, such as olive trees that represent peace. Students will also connect with nature through art projects done in the garden and will work on a larger art project together that will stay a permanent fixture in the garden. This will be unveiled and celebrated at the community garden day for Juneteenth.

The Juneteenth community garden day will bring together about 300 community members to celebrate African American culture and connect with each other in the healing garden. Campers will have the opportunity to share what they have learned about the garden and how they have positively impacted the space with others in the community. A hot lunch will be provided for all who attend and food necessities for those who are food insecure will be handed out. We hope to partner with other local organizations (for example the Black Liberation Walking Tour, Oakland Black Cowboys Association, Common Vision) to provide resources and education. Art activities and other entertainment will also set the scene for community members to meet with each other and experience the garden. Community members will be able to see plants that may come from their cultures and learn about plants from cultures their neighbors and friends may come from.

Impact:

The summer camp days will allow time for students to be in the garden and connect with nature under experienced garden teachers who will guide their learning. Students will learn about other cultures in the context of nature and will learn how to embrace their culture and the cultures of others. Students and their families will also be given food to help those who are food insecure, which has been made worse by the pandemic.

The Juneteenth community garden day will bring hundreds of community members together for celebration and to bond together in the setting of the garden. This brings opportunities for joy and healing which is a radical act in communities that are struggling so much. The students in the camp will have the opportunity to share what they have learned and will have a strengthened relationship and commitment to nature.

1. <https://abc7news.com/west-oakland-air-pollution-black-and-latino-residents-abc-equity-report-bay-area-quality/11058102/>

Name: Paulina Tarr
 Project Name: Cultivating Peace and Community in West Oakland
 School: UC Berkeley

Note: all funds in US dollars.

Projects for Peace grant: \$ 10,000.00
 Additional Funding, if any:
 Total funding available: \$ 10,000.00

TOTAL FUNDS REMAINING:
 #VALUE!

TOTAL EXPENDITURES:
 #VALUE!

Student Expenses					Project Expenses				
Travel (Including Airfare)	Lodging	Communications	Food (Biweekly)	Miscellaneous	Non-Student Travel and Lodging	Direct Equipment and Supplies	Marketing and Event Support	Staffing Costs	Miscellaneous
						2 or 3 trees (\$300)		community day entertainment (600)	
						Wood chips (300)		professional garden teacher (400)	
						Compost (300)		custodial staff (300x3)	
						Adult and Kids gardening gloves (300)		Camp counselors (400)	
						outdoor seating for students - Milk crates and cushion (600)			
						Art supplies (150)			
						camp Breakfast and lunch (200)			
						community day food (400)			
						Other gardening supplies (200)			
Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	~3,000	\$ -	~3,000	\$ -

Total Student Expenses: 0

Total Project Expenses: ~6000

Note: Food for distribution for food insecure community members at camp days and the community celebration day should be donated from other sources. However, if not then expenses will be about \$800 higher
 Note: Excess funds could go towards may other garden repairs and supplies that will last and allow for more community interaction in the garden.



Hoover Elementary - 890 Brockhurst St. Oakland, 94608

To Whom it May Concern,

This letter is to verify that Hoover Elementary, a school within the Oakland Unified School District, is in full support of the grant funds as written in the Davis Project for Peace application. All funds will be utilized for the benefit of Hoover Elementary Garden, located at 890 Brockhurst St. in Oakland, Ca. We will cooperate with the writer of the grant to implement the plans as written.

Respectfully submitted,

Lissette Averhoff

Principal, Hoover Elementary

Kate Sbani

Early Literacy Coach, Hoover Elementary

EDUCATION

University of California, Berkeley

Bachelor of Arts in Molecular and Cell Biology (Immunology)

CalTeach Minor

Expected Graduation: May 2022

Paid Experience

The Rothman Family

Berkeley, CA

In-Home Educator

August 2020 - March 2020

- Facilitates the remote learning of twin kindergarteners in their home
- Creates science, math, and reading lessons to strengthen and reinforce their curriculum, as well as outside topics of interest
- Provides structured daily schedules and interacts with students through play

VOLUNTEER & LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Project SMILE

Berkeley, CA

Mentor, Enrichment Coordinator, Co-internal Coordinator

Fall 2017- Fall 2019

- Acted as a “big sibling” figure for a local underprivileged middle school student afterschool
- Facilitated the bonding of mentors and mentees through the execution of academic, artistic, and culturally inclusive workshops and managed a committee
- Maintained the matches between over 120 mentor-mentee pairs through mentor training, check-ins and counseling

UC Berkeley

Berkeley, CA

Bio 1B Undergraduate Student Instructor

Spring 2019

- Aided the facilitation of a university level introductory ecology, evolution, and plant biology laboratory
- Taught curriculum using live plant samples, data from nearby streams, and trips to outdoor gardens
- Participated in weekly pedagogy discussions with course staff

CalTeach

Berkeley, CA

Field Teaching

Spring 2019 - Present

- Built lessons and critically analyzed student work using experiences from field placements
- Aided Kindergarten, Middle School, and High School Science Classrooms in Oakland, Richmond, and El Cerrito for 12-24 hours per semester
- Received continuous feedback from students and teachers to improve teaching techniques

Bove Lab at UCSF

San Francisco, CA

Undergraduate Researcher

Fall 2019 - Present

- Works to implement and study brain volume changes as a clinical marker to inform physicians about disease progression for Multiple Sclerosis patients
- Runs brain volume metrics for patient cohorts on a weekly basis and analyzes resulting graphs
- Acts as a leader of the Clinical Operations Group through facilitation, goal setting, and mentoring