

Dear Kansas Association for Conservation
& Environmental Education;



As the principal of Complete High School Maize, I am excited about the opportunity for our school to construct a garden. Complete High School Maize opened its doors as the alternative school for USD 266 in the fall of 1999. Its primary goal was helping students earn their high school diplomas. CHSM has evolved into an experiential learning center for students in grades 9-12 who have either previously dropped out of school or are being unsuccessful at their traditional high school and at risk of dropping out. Throughout its 17 years, CHSM has helped over 400 would-be high school dropouts to reach this goal. More importantly, however, CHSM has attempted to not just graduate good students, but good people with a wide array of life skills that go beyond just academics. With the majority of our students coming from unstable homes or low-income situations, the skills required to grow one's own food are extremely valuable to our students. Our science teacher, Heidi Albin, has attempted to teach agricultural skills to our students during her past 7 years at CHSM. Among the agriculture-related hands-on activities that take place under Mrs. Albin's direction, students have learned about the health benefits of home gardening, planted vegetable plants in the large garden at the Albin home, set up a composter at the school, started vegetable seeds in small containers to sell as a spring fundraiser, and created a small garden in the front flower bed at the school. Unfortunately, all of the students' agricultural experiences have been limited by the lack of an ideal garden at the school. The current school garden can hold very few plants and does not receive adequate sunlight. During the plant fundraiser, every inch of the counter tops in the science classroom were covered with seedling containers and students had to rotate the containers around the room to allow each plant a portion of the sunlight that came in through the classroom's two windows. While Mr. and Mrs. Albin have allowed students to experience gardening at their home, transportation can be difficult to arrange and the students do not get to see the daily progress of their hard work. There is no shortage of interest in gardening among the students; Mrs. Albin's gardening and agriculture classes are always quite popular, however our school is in desperate need of a functional garden at the school.

An additional advantage of having an onsite garden is the community involvement that will result. CHSM students are active in the Maize community and are excited to invite residents from Via Christi Village to enjoy the garden. Our students already volunteer with Via Christi Village and have formed relationships with the residents. We look forward to learning from and working with residents in the garden or in the classroom on a weekly basis. Many of our students do not have good adult role models in their lives (other than the CHSM staff) and will greatly benefit from interacting with wise adults. The residents will share not only gardening-related knowledge with our students, but also life-lessons and wisdom. As residents build relationships with our students and invest in their lives through time spent together, both partners will feel more loved and cared for.

The residents can also help to maintain the garden in the summer. We have had student volunteers in the past who sign up to pull weeds in our flower beds during the summer and last summer a student also volunteered to tend the recently-constructed flower bed garden. However, despite good intentions, it always proves to be more difficult for students to commit throughout the entire summer. The Via Christi Village residents can solve that problem by tending to the garden during the summer months; and students will be more likely to tend to the garden during the summer as well if their resident-friends will be there.

Thank you for considering our school for this generous grant. We truly believe our project idea will impact multiple lives. If you have further questions, please e mail me at kcuster@usd266.com or call me at (316) 722-4790.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kristy Custer'.

Kristy Custer

Complete High School Maize
745 W. Central
Maize, KS 67101
usd266.com
phone: 316-722-4790
fax: 316-729-0621

Dear KACEE:



My name is Kristen Burwell and I am the mother of a student at Complete High School Maize, named Shelby Burwell. CHSM is an excellent school that has significantly helped my daughter in her education. CHSM is a service learning and activities-based school where the dedicated staff take on far more responsibilities than what is in their job descriptions in order to make learning valuable to students who have struggled at the traditional high schools. This is one of the reasons why CHSM was named a National School of Character for 2015. In addition to the many hours CHSM teachers dedicate to the students outside of the school day, funding for many of the projects that teachers do comes out of their own pockets. CHSM teachers have an abundance of motivation and dedication, but often lack the funds required to bring to life the exciting ideas they have. I am thrilled to know that your organization can make their gardening project a reality. This will be my first major volunteer experience with CHSM and I feel that it is an incredible opportunity for the students at CHSM to experience gardening and healthy life styles.

Growing your own food for budgetary and health reasons has always been important to me. Most students have had little or no exposure to growing food. Home gardens are becoming scarce and many young people lack even basic horticultural knowledge. CHSM focuses on teaching students life skills, and the ability to grow one's own produce and understand the health benefits is a life skill that everyone should have. I believe that this garden will not only teach students basics of gardening, but will also show them the rewards of consistent hard work. I also love the fact that this garden will link CHSM students to elderly individuals and elementary students. I am excited for CHSM students to learn from people who have had so many years of experience and then enhance their knowledge by teaching what they learn from the nursing home residents to the elementary school students. I look forward to seeing relationships blossom among such diverse generations.

After Heidi Albin announced that CHSM would be applying for this grant, a number of parents, students, and past graduates have shown interest in helping to make the gardening project a reality. I can serve on a planning committee to get the word out about this project organize all the interested volunteers. I will help the committee write an article for our school's newsletter as well as reach out through social media. Our committee will meet with representatives from Via Christi and Denning Greenhouse for ongoing discussions about how this project can be used for the mutual benefit of all involved. I believe that CHSM has the staff dedication, student interest, and love from the community to make this project a reality.

Once again, thank you for considering Complete High School Maize for your grant.

Sincerely,

Kristen Burwell

Complete High School Maize
745 W. Central
Maize, KS 67101
usd266.com
phone: 316-722-4790
fax: 316-729-0621



10707 W. 21st N.

Wichita, Kansas 67205

Kansas Association for Conservation
& Environmental Education
2610 Clafin Road
Manhattan, KS 66502

January 26, 2016

Dear KACEE,

My name is Jim Denning and I am the owner of Denning's Greenhouse & Garden Center, Inc. We operate a greenhouse/garden center facility to grow and market a wide variety of plants, including fruits and vegetables. We have partnered with Heidi Albin at Complete High School Maize in the past to provide her class with used planting containers that she and her students grew vegetables in. Additionally, an employee and I volunteered to serve as interviewers when CHSM helped their students learn soft skills through their mock interview program. Mrs. Albin has also offered to have a group of her students come to our facility to volunteer. I strongly recommend Complete High School Maize for the Youth Gardening School Community Partnership grant and my business looks forward to partnering with them in this way.

Through our partnership with CHSM, we hope to help open student's minds to the science of growing and marketing plant products, as well as enjoying the process. With the increasing number of hobbies and technologies vying for young people's attention, we feel that exposing them to growing plants in a school garden could spark a passion that otherwise may never be discovered. We want to help CHSM expose students to the benefits of gardening as well as the scientific and business knowledge that one learns in our industry. During our less busy months, I can help teach students the basics and Mrs. Albin has invited me into her classroom to work with her students at any time or to be a speaker to the entire CHSM student body as we begin the CHSM Garden project.

Developing a passion for plants is the first step. Exposing students to the business part is the next step. Our business can serve as an example and resource for both steps. We will help CHSM acquire the plants and gardening items necessary for this project and inform the community of their project as we interact with customers. We can serve as a source of knowledge for the CHSM staff and students as they plan, construct, plant, and manage their garden. Students could volunteer at our business to acquire both horticultural and marketing knowledge that they can then use in managing their school garden. We look forward to partnering with CHSM not only as a source of plants and items, but also as a source of knowledge and mentors. Please consider CHSM for your generous grant.

Sincerely,

Jim Denning

Jim Denning



Dear KACEE;

...because your life matters

My name is Sara Noller and I am the Activities Director at Via Christi Village on Ridge. Via Christi Village is a senior living community for those needing care settings of Assisted Living, Long Term Care and Skilled Rehab. Our mission statement is "Inspired by the Gospel and our Catholic tradition, we serve as a healing presence with special concern for our neighbors who are vulnerable." We are thrilled to partner with Complete High School Maize to incorporate their garden as part of our healing. The quality of life for the residents who make our ministry their home is very important to us. We work hard to provide a variety of activities for them to choose from to help them remain active and involved in the community. This gardening partnership would be a wonderful opportunity to accomplish these goals of connectivity. Many of our residents enjoy gardening, but we do not currently have a handicap-accessible garden for their use. We are excited about the prospect of a garden that would provide ease of access for our residents.

Not only would the garden be beneficial for the physical health of our residents, but the emotional benefits of enjoying a pastime in the outdoors will greatly contribute to their wellbeing. The added benefit of interaction with students makes the CHSM Garden all the more valuable. Residents who do not have visitors on a regular basis find joy in interacting with students. The CHSM students currently volunteer at our facility in a number of ways and they have formed positive relationships with our residents. When our residents spend time with younger generations, they smile and laugh, while sharing stories and investing in the students. Our residents will enjoy the opportunity to share their knowledge with students both in a classroom setting and informally while gardening; they have so much to share, and the CHSM students are eager to learn. Our residents will also greatly benefit from interactions with elementary school children. The benefits of intergenerational programs for all age groups involved are a great asset; students receive support from others in the community and seniors' feelings of isolation are lowered. The joy that students bring to the life of seniors in our communities are unlike any other. Many of our residents have memory impairment and tend to believe they are left alone with no one to love. This pairings are a great asset to the uplifting lifestyle we try to provide in our ministry.

We are excited to work with Complete High School Maize for the mutual benefit of our residents and their students. Our residents can make trips with our transportation team to take care of the gardening area during the summer months and when students are out of school. Our ministry also has many volunteers who could benefit from spending time with the residents and students while contributing to the gardening area. However, the vision of this project goes beyond just having the residents care for the garden in the summer. CHSM has invited our residents to use the garden at any time, especially during the school day when they can interact with the CHSM students and elementary students to teach them gardening techniques. This project will impact our residents for many years to come; thank you for your interest in helping CHSM with the funding necessary to make this wonderful project a reality.

Sincerely,


Sara Noller