STUDENTS ARE COMING BACK by JORDAN JOHNSON

Early this month, the Charlottesville City School board voted to move forward with a voluntary return to in-person learning for K-6 students. Almost an entire year after the beginning of the pandemic, the Cultivate Charlottesville is excited and ready to welcome students back to their school gardens! During this time of virtual learning, our Garden Coordinators have been engaging with CCS students through neighborhood garden clubs at Hearthwood Apartments, Friendship Court and City of Promise. As we prepare to welcome students back to school, we will continue to prioritize our after school neighborhood garden clubs while simultaneously engaging with teachers and students during the school day.

Given the need to divide garden time between school day and after school programming, our garden coordinators are creating new ways of engaging with teachers and students at the schools. By creating monthly schedules that lay out where in the school gardens we will be on any given week or day, we aim to create a streamlined and simple process for teachers to utilize the gardens. We have always encouraged use of the gardens beyond the programming with the garden coordinators, but now we are hoping to prepare teachers with what they need to take us up on the offer.

We have begun developing lists of activities that teachers can do in the garden spaces without us there such as:
Lunch in the garden
- Recess
- Morning circles
- Teacher-led activities such as bug hunts, bird watching, and free garden explore time
- Bringing the students out when they could just use a break!

We are excited to continue our collaboration with CCS teachers to engage with their students through garden-based learning, while also trying new ways of getting students outside in the garden space with their peers. All of our gardens are for CCS students and as they return to school we want them to feel supported, safe, and excited to grow food, interact with nature, and enjoy getting their hands dirty!