

School to get a new look?

Parents at the Roosevelt initiate school beautification project

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Parents at the Roosevelt elementary school have decided to work together to give their children's school a facelift.

Several years ago, when the school's heating system was converted from oil to natural gas, a few trees that previously adorned the front of the school property were removed to aid in construction.

"Now it looks somewhat barren," said Kath Holland, part of a team of volunteers from COGdesign (Community Outreach Group for Landscape Design), a non-profit group that is helping with efforts to beautify the school.

Leah Kendall, who has a son in first grade at the Roosevelt, and is a member of the school's parent council, is one of a group of parents that has spearheaded the fledgling landscaping initiative.

"It came about because a few parents were cleaning up this fall and the woman who is the chair of the parent council said 'I just wish the school looked nicer,'" Kendall explained.

So the parents decided to take the matter of beautifying the school into their own hands, contacting the Boston Schoolyard Initiative, a program that funds schoolyard development. But the initiative had become short on funds, and couldn't help.

Through their efforts with the Schoolyard initiative, Parents were put into contact with COGdesign. COG organizes professional designers, architects and landscapers to do pro-bono design work for non-profits and other entities that might not otherwise have the funds to undertake landscaping and design projects.

A COG team has begun the early stages of a new design plan for the outside of the Roosevelt.

"We work through their purpose, their goals, their mission, what is it they want to accomplish and how it's going to be integrated," explained Cristina Cabrera, the COG project manager for the Roosevelt design effort.

For now, the beautification initiative is only in its very preliminary stages.

Assuming the pro-bono design phase is completed, parents will still have to come up with the funds to implement the project.

"We have some money to raise but we're a scrappy group," Kendall explained.

Taking ownership

And though the effort is barely off the ground, parents and school staff already have bold visions for the new landscaping and what it could mean for their children's learning experience.

The underutilized park across the street from the school grounds, which is owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR; formerly the MDC), could, according to Kendall, become part of the landscaping project and function as an outdoor laboratory and classroom for the Roosevelt's students, if the DCR approves.

"For me, it's exciting. I can see where we will gain through the beautification, for ourselves and our neighbors," said Mary Brown Daniels, the Roosevelt's principal, "But there are ties to our curriculum."

"As we look at student work and at our whole student improvement plan, we want to make sure we have a good and positive environment," Daniels explained. "There is so much around us that [the students] don't observe deeply. [The landscaping plan] gives them the opportunity, and there are so many scientific and literary benefits connected to it."

Daniels emphasized that the plan is still in its infancy, and it may yet not come to fruition.

But Kendall pointed to even more ambitious goals for the

school, which speak to the current level of parent involvement.

"We'd like to make the Roosevelt K through eight and, certainly, this kind of project would help us out," Kendall said. The school currently ends in sixth grade.

In the short term, the focus will be to try to find money to undertake the new landscaping. Kendall said the project could entail two phases - the beautification of the front of the school, followed by work on the park across the street.

So far, parents and school have met with COG to present their ideas, and the COG team will soon return with preliminary



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The Roosevelt Elementary School, seen from a DCR park across the street. Both park and school could be part of a parent-initiated beautification project that is still in its preliminary planning stages.

ideas of their own.

"We'll work out a plan that will be feasible, and hopefully the community will embrace it as well," said Cabrera, adding

that her team would perhaps be able to present some plans by mid April.

"It's basically exciting," said Daniels.