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## **LPPS supports students with autism to maintain community garden, run farmer's market**

*Interactive program for young adults with autism prepares students to enter workforce and live independently*

**Lincoln Park, Mich.** – Post-secondary students from Lincoln Park's **Mixer Institute for Transition** learn about horticulture, landscaping and entrepreneurship as they cultivate a community-based garden and manage a farmer's market that operates twice weekly. Mixer's post-secondary program focuses on teaching work and life skills that will prepare students for future jobs and independent living.

"The goal of our post-secondary program is to prepare all of our students for the workforce and to live as independent adults," said **Jessica Fessler**, principal of **Mixer Institute for Transition**. "Our students have gained valuable experience in entrepreneurship, horticulture and landscaping that will improve their employability. We have also found that working in the garden promotes healthy living by exposing students to fresh, healthy vegetables and encourages healthy eating."

The garden sits behind Mixer School and has the potential to expand across a 2.5 acre plot of land. It features 19 raised vegetable beds built by Mixer students and a pumpkin patch. Students grow green peppers, jalapeños, butternut squash, tomatoes, lavender, cabbage, cucumbers, green beans, cauliflower, brussels sprouts and eggplant.

The garden was made possible by fundraising and donations. Mixer garden sponsors include **Keep Growing Detroit**, **Buckets of Rain**, the **Wayne County Community Action Agency** and the **Detroit Resource Program**.

Every Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 2:15 p.m. students operate Market Fridays where they sell produce, baked goods, body scrubs and other student-made crafts including jewelry and corn hole boards.

"We have partnerships with nearly 20 local businesses that provide job site opportunities for our students to help them gain valuable hard and soft employability skills," said **Chandra Bonnau**, a teacher at Mixer. "Thanks to several new courses and our community garden, students can now learn about landscaping and horticulture while also learning what it's like to be an entrepreneur."

Other course offerings include cooking, wood shop, pre-employment skills, life skills, social skills, sewing and crafts and health. Post-secondary students can also participate in several extracurricular activities including the Men's and Women's Clubs, Anime Club, Yearbook Club, Video Game Club and Yoga Club.

"In Lincoln Park we do everything in our power to make sure Mixer students are equipped with tools that will prepare them for the workforce and to be able to function independently as adults," said **Nicole Chubb**, Executive Director of Special Education at Lincoln Park Public Schools. "It's so rewarding to watch these students grow, achieve and give back to their community. They gain skills that will follow them into their careers."

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### **About Mixer Institute of Transition**

On behalf of Wayne RESA, Lincoln Park Public Schools operates an autism program that services 230 students between the ages of 3 and 26 with moderate to severe autism who reside in one of 17 Downriver school districts or the city of Dearborn. Mixer Institute for Transition's post-secondary program serves students between the ages of 18 and 26.