Wright College Student Environmental Club:  
Illinois Green Schools Day of Service

On Friday, September 28, 2012, three students from Wright College’s Environmental Club and Wright Sustainability staff attended the Illinois Green Schools Day of Service at Vaughn Occupational High School in Chicago’s Portage Park neighborhood. Accompanied by Vaughn Science and Gardening Instructor Patricia Bonness, the Environmental Club members worked with eighteen (18) of Vaughn’s special needs students.

Vaughn provides a specialized education for high school students with cognitive, developmental and multiple disabilities. The school’s mission is to teach their students individualized, functional academics, emphasizing occupational development and independence. Vaughn is one of a few schools recognized for its excellence in providing integrated programs that include students with non-disabled peers from other schools. Students are also assimilated through strong community and business partnerships.

Wright’s students worked with the Vaughn young people in turning several compost bins, weeding the vegetable garden, sifting through the raised planter beds to screen for weeds and grubs and also pick some of the ripened vegetables for use in the school’s culinary program. In fact, as part of the regular gardening program, Vaughn students regularly collect worm compost for their greenhouse and vegetable garden, placing it in bags and preparing it for local sale. The compost is used to grow the plants and herbs that the Culinary Arts program at Vaughn uses to prepare meals. All excess is sold as a fundraising source to continue the program.

Wright’s Environmental Club members were invited to join the Vaughn students and staff to sample a luncheon meal prepared by culinary students and seasoned, of course, by herbs from their own vegetable garden. Environmental Club members expressed an interest in returning to Vaughn to work on some future projects together.

Ms. Bonness of Vaughn, also mentioned to the Wright group, that they were the recent recipients of several photovoltaic panels, and weren’t sure what to do with them. Wright College Building Environmental Department staff have since met with Vaughn staff to look at the modules first hand and examine the garden site, and have proposed several possible plans for mounting, securing, installing, and utilizing the photovoltaic system outdoors at the school.

Thanks also to Ms. Felicia Watts-Fox, Vaughn’s Assistant Principal, in coordinating this event.