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A SLOW ECONOMY CAN BRING KIDS — AND THEIR PARENTS — CLOSER TO NATURE

Fort Worth, Texas – [February. 9, 2009] – In these lean times, parents may be wondering how to keep the kids enriched and entertained when the bank account no longer quite covers all the private lessons and latest video games.

It's a good time to slow down, take a deep breath, and step into the backyard or a local park with your child. Connecting with nature calms and soothes both children and adults, and it is something that both children and adults can do for a wealth of benefits, for free. REAL School Gardens, a nonprofit organization that brings gardens to elementary schools, sees the evidence everyday among the thousands of children in its programs who spend time outdoors not just for recess, but also for learning (www.realschoolgardens.org).

"Our students absolutely love to go into the garden, whether it is to plant something, work on a science lesson, sit and read, or have lunch and observe their surroundings," says librarian Melissa Forsythe at Dickinson Elementary School in Grand Prairie, the newest school in the REAL School Garden network. "I remember a second-grade student heading back to class after spending time in the garden saying, 'This is just like going on a field trip without leaving the building.'"

REAL School Gardens' mission is to deepen children's connection to nature, and ultimately, cultivate future generations of environmentally responsible citizens. Research has found that daily exposure to nature enhances children's cognitive abilities and stimulates their imaginations. Other research has found that children whose school grounds include diverse natural settings are more physically active, more aware of nutrition, and more civil to one another.

"At our core, we love and need nature," said Clare Walker Leslie, nationally acclaimed author of *Keeping a Nature Journal*, who is leading a workshop on nature journaling with parents and teachers in Fort Worth February 10. "It's a part of our ancient structure, and when it's taken away, we feel weird."

Fort Worth may be best known for its cowboy culture and iconic art museums, but thanks to REAL School Gardens it now boasts more school gardens, 54, than any other city in the Southwest.

Leslie's visit to Fort Worth is part of REAL School Gardens' effort to cultivate new support so it can expand to new area school communities. It was some of the famous wealth of Fort Worth that prepared the ground for REAL School Gardens several years ago. The Rainwater Charitable Foundation, started by financier Richard Rainwater, provided funding to establish REAL School Gardens in 2003. Now, in its sixth year of operations with its first executive director, Jeanne McCarty, the organization is thriving and wanting to share its model with other school communities around the country.

About REAL School Gardens

REAL School Gardens cultivates relationships with elementary school communities to create learning gardens that raise hope, spark imaginations and connect children to nature. Currently the organization works with more than 28,000 children in 54 public elementary schools in North Texas. For more information, please visit www.realschoolgardens.org.

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