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Veda Knox Elementary School Readies for May 16 Garden Installation

ARLINGTON, Texas – May 13, 2009 -- The spirit of Veda Knox Elementary School will be in full bloom Saturday, May 16 when the school installs a new garden. Veda Knox is one of four area schools that have recently partnered with REAL School Gardens to add outdoor learning environments to their campuses.

Other area schools with new gardens include Hubbard Heights Elementary, Birdville Elementary and David E. Smith Elementary. The gardens are the culmination of a community design process begun last September during a weekend retreat facilitated by REAL School Gardens.

All students, families, staff and community members were invited to participate in a series of garden planning events last winter. Students drew “dream gardens” and posted their drawings to inspire other ideas and proposals from the broader community. REAL School Garden’s design consultant Kerry Renta took these sketches and compiled them into what Holli Hall, a math/science instructor, described as “an amazing design” for a final proposal.

Renta said the students were clearly enthusiastic about the garden project. “In the design meeting, I remember a group of three 9-year-old boys who worked tirelessly on their dream garden design,” he said. “They took their design home to finish up so they could show their teacher the next day.”

Faculty and school officials believe the garden will be a great opportunity to enrich the school’s curriculum and provide instructional opportunities for teachers. As an addition to the outdoor classroom, the garden will be also used as a way to get families involved with the school and their children’s education in a different way.

Hall explained the garden will be named “Veda Knox Spirit Garden” after a garden-naming contest where each grade level voted on a winning name, and then all the winning names were submitted for a school-wide vote. Hall wrote the grant for the garden with assistance from other concerned staff members who hope to engage children in experiential learning opportunities.

Hall said she’s also looking forward to actively engaging the community in making the Veda Knox Spirit Garden a success, including recruiting master gardeners to volunteer their expertise and time. “We know as our garden grows, so will the community involvement,” she said.

“We’re looking forward to welcoming another school garden into our growing network,” said Scott Feille, REAL School Gardens’ program director. “It’s heartening to see a school community come together in the way Veda Knox has to make better opportunities for their students.” As a former educator, Feille knows the value of a school garden and the impact it can have upon children, especially those who have few opportunities to explore and learn in the outdoors.

Children who grow their own food are more likely to adopt healthy, nutritious lifestyles, according to research conducted at the University of Colorado at Denver. Students with access to school gardens have increased self-understanding, interpersonal relationship skills and work in groups more effectively than those without gardens, the research reports. Students engaged in outdoor education tend to enjoy learning and exhibit improved attitudes towards education, the findings show.

REAL School Gardens embraces a shared belief that the best way to embed learning into life is to allow children to experience it outdoors. The organization creates safe outdoor spaces to engage young children. It uses nature to enhance student learning, encourages family and community involvement in schools, and creates vibrant, sharing networks of educators and partners who commit to putting school gardens at the heart of urban neighborhoods.

About REAL School Gardens

The mission of REAL School Gardens is to cultivate relationships with elementary school communities to create learning gardens that raise hope, spark imaginations and connect children to nature.

Currently, REAL School Gardens works with 57 schools, ensuring that more than 30,000 children and more than 1,400 educators have daily access to nature through school gardens in North Texas. With plans to reach more students and school communities across the country, the organization is itself growing.