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### **REAL SCHOOL GARDENS BRINGS LEARNING GARDENS TO LIFE IN DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

DALLAS, Texas — [December 30, 2009] — REAL School Gardens, a Fort Worth-based non-profit organization that works with underserved elementary schools in North Texas, is launching a new collaboration with the Dallas Independent School District. This partnership with elementary schools creates school gardens that engage children in hands-on learning, and provides parents and community members with new opportunities to become involved in the public schools.

This year, four DISD schools will receive support for garden installations on their campuses. Victor H. Hexter Elementary School installs a garden on January 8 and Alex Sanger Elementary School installs a garden on January 15. Both schools are in East Dallas and will benefit from students, parents, teachers and community volunteers who participate in transforming a piece of the school's campus into a learning garden.

REAL School Gardens creates outdoor classrooms at elementary schools with the goal of providing green spaces and teaching elements that facilitate hands-on learning in nature. During the school day, children have opportunities to observe real life occurrences outdoors, such as life cycles and the weather's impact on flora. Learning occurs in all seasons, even during the winter when ice may fill birdbaths and many trees are leafless.

REAL School Gardens and its school partners agree that most of what can be taught indoors can also be learned outdoors from math and science to language arts and social studies. Schools don't need a large green space in order to teach children outdoors, but rather a few key elements to inspire teachable moments. Experiential learning engages children and often helps them focus, understand and truly learn concepts for a lifetime, often much better than learning that happens from textbooks alone.

Victor H. Hexter and Alex Sanger Elementary Schools have nearly 500 students each, 62 and 88 percent of whom, respectively, are considered low-income. Both schools have large Hispanic populations and bilingual education programs. In 2008, the schools each received an "Exemplary" ranking from the Texas Education Agency. These elementary schools plan to use their gardens as outdoor classrooms to teach botany, natural ecosystems, environmental stewardship and leadership skills, while giving children access to fresh and organic food.

“We are really excited to incorporate outdoor learning into our curriculum. Our goal is to get the children involved and connect all areas of their learning to nature and the real world,” said Marissa Muntz, a first-grade language arts and math teacher at Alex Sanger. “Our current design plan includes building a sun garden that will have cedar fencing and cedar arbor entrances to a circular design layout of raised vegetable and native Texas plant beds, with decomposed granite pathways.”

On installation day, each student has the opportunity to help create the school garden. Classes cycle through the garden to add their contribution to the collective project. Children transport soil, granite, compost and mulch in wheel barrels. They wet and lay newspaper to ensure weed control is organic. Kids experiment with simple machines, also known as garden tools. Their learning is facilitated by REAL School Gardens’ staff who ensure that the day is both fun and educational.

In Dallas, Harry C. Withers Elementary received a garden in December 2009 and Robert E. Lee Elementary will install their outdoor classroom on February 5, 2010.

“From the upper levels of district administration who make our efforts in Dallas possible to the dedicated teachers, parents and neighbors that bring each school garden to life, we are honored to be working with a community that shows so much dedication to engaging students outdoors,” said Scott Feille, Regional Program Director at REAL School Gardens. “We are absolutely thrilled to support not only rigorous academic inquiry in the Dallas gardens, but also the establishment of nurturing environments that cultivate serenity, a strengthened sense of belonging and pride among students.”

#### **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. In addition to garden installations, REAL School Gardens provides year-round support for the gardens, professional development opportunities for educators and community-wide networking events.

Currently, REAL School Gardens works with 66 elementary schools in five urban school districts, ensuring that more than 40,000 children and more than 2,300 educators have daily access to nature through school gardens in North Texas. With a six-year history in Fort Worth and recent expansion into Grand Prairie, REAL School Gardens is launching a partnership in Dallas. With plans to reach more students and school communities across the country, the organization is itself growing. For more information, visit [www.realschoolgardens.org](http://www.realschoolgardens.org).

#### **About Dallas Independent School District**

The Dallas Independent School District is the second largest school district in Texas and the twelfth largest in the nation with over 160,000 students. It serves the cities of Dallas, Addison, Balch Springs, Carrollton, Desoto, Duncanville, Ferris, Garland, Grand Prairie, Hutchins, Lancaster, Mesquite, Seagoville, and Wilmer with thirty-four high schools, thirty-seven middle schools, and 159 elementary schools. The mission of Dallas Independent School District is to prepare all students to graduate with the knowledge and skills to become productive and responsible citizens. On the internet, visit [www.dallasisd.org](http://www.dallasisd.org).