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## LOOK WHAT'S GROWING AT LOCAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

### ***New garden to be installed Saturday, April 4 at Hubbard Heights Elementary***

Fort Worth, Texas – [March 27, 2009] – Hubbard Heights Elementary School students, faculty, administrators and a dedicated corps of community volunteers will soon witness the fruits of their labor with the installation of a school garden on April 4. Hubbard Heights is one of four area elementary schools that will install gardens this spring with the support of REAL School Gardens. Other schools to gain outdoor classrooms include Birdville Elementary School on March 28; David E. Smith Elementary on April 18; and Veda Knox Elementary on May 9.

More than 250 parents, teachers, students and community members joined forces to design Hubbard Heights' dream school garden, which will be used for outdoor learning. Kerry Renta, REAL School Garden's landscape design consultant who is also a third-grade teacher, guided Hubbard Heights through a series of community design charrettes. The word, "charrette" is French for "cart" and is often used to describe the final, intense work effort by art and architecture students to meet a project deadline.

The gardens are the culmination of a community design process begun last September during a weekend retreat facilitated by REAL School Gardens. Months of discussion, planning, site evaluation, and preparation will culminate at the April 4 installation. "Watching how these school communities came together to support the development of these gardens validates the passion we have at REAL School Gardens for the work we do," said Jeanne McCarty, executive director.

After reviewing the various dream garden plans, Renta blended varying elements from each to come up with a final design of an efficient, educationally-appropriate garden that supported the school's outdoor education goals. A 3-D model of the final design was created by members of the committee to give school constituents an idea of how the final design would look. Hardscaping work at the Hubbard Heights garden site has begun, and volunteers have already installed plant beds.

Scott Feille, REAL School Garden's Fort Worth program director, said school officials expect a strong turnout for the installations, with local restaurants donating food and refreshments for the events. "We're extremely proud to have developed relationships with these four schools. They exemplify what is possible when educators, families, and communities come together with a common vision," he said.

Hubbard Heights has received guidance for their science education programs from TCU's Andrews Institute of Mathematics, Science & Technology Education. Institute director Molly Weinburgh, Ph.D. and assistant

professor of science education Mark Bloom, Ph.D. are providing year-round support under a teacher quality grant.

Weinburgh said the grant focuses on using the outdoors to teach, whether in “distant” places or in one’s own backyard. “Having a garden at Hubbard will provide the teachers with a venue for teaching outside,” she said. “We hope students studying science as well as other disciplines will use the garden and learn to love the out of doors.”

Dorene Benavidez, Hubbard Heights Elementary School’s Principal, remarked how the community at large has come together to improve the learning opportunities for the students. Benavidez said, “I have been amazed with the amount of parents that have contributed to landscaping and volunteering time after their own work hours. We are so grateful and appreciative of their efforts!” The Hubbard Heights teachers are thrilled to incorporate the garden into their lesson plans.

As a former educator, Feille knows the value of outdoor classrooms. “Gardens are powerful tools, not only for increasing academic achievement, but also for growing confident, caring children who know how to work in teams,” he says. The garden installation will be a community-wide effort, he added, “and a wonderful example of teamwork for the children involved.”

#### **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 1,300 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. On the Internet, visit [www.realschoolgardens.org](http://www.realschoolgardens.org).

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