



Press Release

For Immediate Release:
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La Merced Elementary Unveils MUSD's 20th Garden **District Partners Continue to Invest in School-Based Garden Programs**

MONTEBELLO, Calif. – Marking the opening of Montebello Unified's 20th school garden, La Merced Elementary School students, parents, community members, and school and district staff unveiled their new gardening program with a special event on Dec. 5.

The ribbon-cutting event included words by La Merced Principal Rebecca Castro, Board Member Lani Cupchoy, Superintendent of Education Susanna Contreras Smith, the Bell Gardens Intermediate Environmental Garden Club Vice President Litzi Reyes and Directors Eva Cupchoy and John Garza. The name of the garden was also unveiled as the Garden of Peace.

"The student garden movement at Montebello Unified continues to grow with the help of dedicated District staff, community members, parents, and District partners," said MUSD Board of Education President Edgar Cisneros. "We are so grateful and thrilled to have the resources, investment and commitment of our District and community to keep this program thriving."

The garden was made possible in large part by an \$18,000 grant awarded by the Sherwood Foundation, an organization committed to connecting students and families to programs and practices that help students reach their full potential. The unveiling also comes days before a local nursery's pledge to donate plants to school gardens throughout Montebello Unified.

"School-based gardening represents a holistic model for planting, harvesting, marketing, and eating that draws on the strengths of the neighborhood and transforms schools into community health spaces," said MUSD Board Member Lani Cupchoy, who is also a La Merced alumna. "These gardens, coupled with nutrition education, create an opportunity for children and families to communicate with each other, thereby building relationships and strengthening kinships."

More than 2,000 students are involved in Montebello Unified's gardening programs, with 12 garden clubs championing healthy living while bringing awareness to obesity and diabetes by selling their harvests at the seasonal MUSD Farmers Markets to students, staff and community members.

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The District and its partners have sought additional grants to expand their programs, incorporate gardening activities into their curriculum and promote principles of sustainability and water conservation while aiming to implement student-run gardens at every school to create a healthier community.

"This garden not only teaches our students about the value of health, but it provides a hands-on learning experience that teaches students about how fruits and vegetables are grown." said Superintendent of Education Susanna Contreras Smith. "Congratulations to the La Merced community for this beautiful garden and space."

Photo Captions:

LME Garden3: Two students from MUSD's garden clubs hold the ribbon with (left to right) Bell Gardens Intermediate (BGI) Environmental Garden Club Director Eva Cupchoy, Vice President Litzi Reyes, MUSD Board Member Lani Cupchoy, Sherwood Foundation representative, Superintendent of Schools Cleve Pell, LME Principal Rebecca Castro, Superintendent of Education Susanna Contreras Smith, and BGI Environmental Garden Club Director John Garza to cut the ribbon for the new La Merced Elementary School garden on Dec. 5.

LME Garden1: La Merced Elementary School Principal Rebecca Castro poses with LME students after the ribbon-cutting and unveiling of the Garden of Peace at LME on Dec. 5.

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Montebello Unified School District is a dynamic learning institution employing top-quality educators. It is the combined work of many that allows the District to continue educating more than 30,000 students every year using the 40 Developmental Assets at all of our school sites. It is through everyone's efforts – students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators – that we are achieving the District's number one goal of raising student achievement. Learn more online at www.montebello.k12.ca.us.