

The HEAL Project: Cultivating the Next Generation of Environmental Stewards

Celebrating 20 Years of Outdoor Science Education in San Mateo County

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In 2025, The HEAL Project (Health, Environment, Agriculture, and Learning) is celebrating 20 years of growing gardens—and growing minds. What began in 2005 with a vision to connect students with the natural world through school gardens has blossomed into a dynamic, community-driven nonprofit bringing hands-on environmental education to thousands of young people in San Mateo County. For more than two decades, The HEAL Project has introduced students to pollinators and produce, composting and climate action—all while cultivating curiosity, empathy, and respect for the land.

Why Gardens Matter

At The HEAL Project, we believe every student deserves the chance to learn in—and from—a garden. School gardens are powerful places for science learning, joyful exploration, and connection to food, culture, and community. For pollinator advocates and backyard gardeners, the benefits are familiar: increased biodiversity, food resilience, and environmental stewardship.

Yet sustaining garden programs beyond a season or a school year is a challenge. In the past, many relied on AmeriCorps garden educators, but as that support diminished, so did many programs. In the wake of this divestment, gardens have gone untended, curriculum has been lost, and students have missed out on outdoor learning.

Creative Solutions for a Changing Landscape

Rather than accepting this loss, The HEAL Project has reimagined what sustainability means—both in the soil and in our programs. Our key to success lies in building a resilient ecosystem of support, much like the gardens we care for.

- **Diversified Revenue Streams:** A blend of grants, fee-for-service programming, and donor support allows us to weather funding shifts while serving students consistently.

- **Cross-Sector Partnerships:** Collaborations with schools, districts, counties, and nonprofits expand impact and help underwrite operational costs.
- **Creative, Cost-Offsetting Programs:** After-school clubs, school holiday camps, and our new homeschool-focused Student Farmer program at the 2.5-acre San Mateo County School Farm generate revenue, deepen engagement, and broaden who we serve.

Celebrating 20 Years—and Looking Ahead

As we mark our 20th anniversary, we're proud of our roots and excited about what's next. The HEAL Project now serves more students than ever through its school garden and farm-based programs, with plans to expand its impact nearly sixfold in the coming year. We're working with educators and families to integrate food systems education into classrooms and amplify student voices through a new Student Advisory Board.

We also continue to champion biodiversity and pollinator education. Our farm in El Granada hosts native flowering plants, pollinator hedgerows, and rotating crops—all tended by students. In our curriculum, pollinators play a central role: students observe bee behavior, study habitats, and learn how pollinators are connected to food justice and climate resilience.



An Invitation to the Bee Friendly Community

As gardeners, educators, and pollinator protectors, we know you understand the power of small seeds and patient tending. The Bee Friendly community has long advocated for biodiversity, stewardship, and equitable access to green spaces—values we share at The HEAL Project.

If you're passionate about cultivating the next generation of garden stewards, we invite you to join us. Whether through partnership, donation, volunteering, or simply spreading the word, your support helps build a future where all students—regardless of zip code—can learn in a thriving garden.

Visit www.thehealproject.org to learn more, explore our programs, and grow with us. Together, we can sow the seeds of a more just, resilient, and bee-friendly world.

