WORKFORCE INSTITUTE
SAN JOSÉ - EVERGREEN - COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

The California Native Garden Foundation

June 23, 2020

Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority
33 Las Colinas Lane
San Jose, CA 95119

Re: Open Space Authority Urban Grant Program - Letter of Support for TEACHin Nature

Dear Review Committee:

As members of the Santa Clara Valley community we want to express our strong support of the TEACHin Nature program. Through the unique partnership between the California Native Garden Foundation (CNGF) and the San Jose Evergreen Community College District-Workforce Institute (SJECCD-WI), TEACHin Nature will leverage environmental and educational experts to teach educators how to create and use outdoor classrooms for nature immersion.

For the past two decades, CNGF has served as an ecological community resource in central San Jose. They have created a sustainable land use model with their experimental Regenerative Organic Agriculture Farm and their flagship teaching garden, ELSEE (the Environmental Lab for Sustainability and Ecological Education), which demonstrates the protection of local ecosystems services. The land use model was developed with the support of experts such as, local community members, college interns from all over the world, and other volunteers for the purpose of educating the public, particularly youth, on how to use urban lands for:

- Regenerative Organic Agriculture - a method of growing food that can produce 6-10 times more food than conventional agriculture;
- local food sovereignty;
- human health and well-being;
- protection of pollination;
- protection of biological diversity;
- local climate regulation;
- restoration of local plant communities;
- protection of local soil systems;
- reduction of air pollution including nitrous oxide, nitrous dioxide, CO2, black carbon soot associated with burning of fossil fuels;
- reuse and repurpose of local materials;
- conservation of local water resources including cleansing of water, storage of water and reuse of water, and;
- reuse and repurpose of energy including, garden waste, fish and chicken waste and biogas to contribute to a circular and resilient renewable energy economy.

In addition, this partnership offers the educational experience of the SJECCD-WI, which has provided professional learning and training to local employers and educators for 32 years and led Silicon Valley Career Pathways (SVCP), Northern California's largest network of STEM education and career programs comprised of nearly 60 educational, non-profit, and industry partners. SVCP was recognized by the Community College Futures Assembly in 2019 with the National Bellwether Award in the category of Planning, Governance, and Finance.

COVID-19 has created new challenges for the educational community. TEACHin Nature offers a solution through training teachers to educate outdoors. This provides protection from contamination and outdoor learning helps children build immunity, reduces stress, and offers them the knowledge on how to grow food and care for nature. Though nearly all topics can be taught outdoors - using resources provided by nature - in general teachers are not familiar with outdoor education. TEACHin Nature, through the innovative partnerships between CNGF and SJECCD-WI, is uniquely situated to provide teachers with these skills. Though COVID-19 is creating rippling disasters throughout our county, it also creates an opportunity for us to re-imagine how we want to move forward, hopefully in a way that is more ecologically sustainable for our community and our planet.

For the reasons above and more, we strongly support CNGF and SJECCD-WI with their project proposal of TEACHin Nature.

Sincerely,

Santa Clara Valley Community Partners
(signatures and logos below)

Dr. Hilaria Bauer
Superintendent
Alum Rock Union School District

Robert Bravo, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Campbell Union High School District

Vince Contore
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Juan Cruz
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Sanhita Datta
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Stephanie Palmeri Farias
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East Side Union High School District

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Cheryl Jordan
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Alyssa Lynch
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Teresa O'Niell
Council Member
City of Santa Clara

Nancy Smith
Board President, California Native Garden Foundation
Vice Mayor of the City of Sunnyvale

Matt Stone
Founder/Farmer
Shark Tank Gardens

Dr. Shelly Viramontez
Superintendent
Campbell Union School District