

READS Builds Gardens in Three Charter Schools during National Garden Month

Increasing access and exposure to healthy foods in low-income urban areas

METUCHEN (April 2011) – As fate—or gardening season more likely—would have it, READS will install three school gardens this month just in time for Earth Day at the end of April. A project almost two years in the works, READS’ Garden State Schools Initiative hopes to expose students in these schools and their communities to healthy food alternatives.

The Garden State Schools Initiative (GSSI) was launched in 2010 to combat national trends of obesity in school-aged children by finding sustainable resources and providing healthy food options in schools. The three components of the GSSI allow schools to increase access and exposure to healthy foods by: providing alternative healthy meal options, developing curricula in connection to garden plots, and connecting schools with established programs available in the community. READS hopes to increase access to healthy foods for students and families and teach students about the importance of eating healthy foods.

A very integral piece of the GSSI, the garden installation and curriculum connection has been developed for three schools in New Jersey with the help of the community group, City Green. Not only will City Green oversee the process in the schools during the garden installation, but their education director, Amy Jolin, has created at least three units of curricula for teachers in each school that incorporate the garden into the classroom.

Jennifer Papa, Executive Director of City Green, said, “We have great respect for READS’ Garden State Schools Initiative and its interest in supporting healthy food in schools. The school garden component of this initiative is a wonderful example of their dedication to promoting healthy school environments, supporting education on healthy eating and sustainability, and building community around these goals.”

In April—National Garden Month—three schools have scheduled installation dates. Weather permitting; READS will break ground on April 5th at University Heights Charter School in Newark, on April 18th at Learning Community Charter School in Jersey City, and April 26th at Hope Academy Charter School in Asbury Park.

There is no better time to see the fruits and vegetables of the labor done for the Garden State Schools Initiative than during Earth Month as the garden installs take place.

As a nonprofit, READS is committed to building strong organizations and communities through innovative real estate development. Since its inception in 2003, READS has assisted dozens of nonprofits in developing their facilities to meet their social service needs.



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Building with Purpose

READS has been recognized by the New Jersey Department of Education with the Corporate Partnership Award for its work with charter schools and by the Federal Department of Education as a promising practice in real estate development.

For more information on the Garden State Schools Initiative and other READS initiatives, including how to donate seeds and benches to school gardens, contact Program Manager Lauren Bolline at (732) 635-1000 x114.

On the web:

www.readsusa.org