

# Truckee Elementary School Community Garden

## Truckee Elementary / TDPUD Defensible Space

### **Background:**

Truckee Elementary School is a High Performing Title 1 school with a diverse campus reflecting our unique community that serves about 600 students from PreSchool to 5th grade. Our staff, community, and students work together to encourage responsibility, integrity, and an enthusiasm for lifelong learning. Our Truckee Elementary School Garden is a reflection of our beautiful school community and we take great pride in all that it provides our school environment.

### **Student Impact Statements:**

"The school garden makes me feel happy because I can find peppers and cilantro in the garden, so I think of my grandma" - Lucette, 4th grade

"The school garden makes me happy because we dig up potatoes from the dirt and I did not know that they lived down there. Even under the snow they still live down there! We find bugs in the garden living with the potatoes and we look at them like scientists"  
- Gabe, Kindergarten

"The school garden is special because we make soup in the Fall with potatoes and herbs from the garden. We call it stone soup and we read a book about it and study pioneer life, like what did the pioneers in Truckee find to cook with and what native plants did they use? It's pretty cool." - Jose, 5th grade

"The school garden is a place where we have made clay pinch pots and we have talked about how the clay soil was used by Native Americans to make pottery. We fire our clay pots in our kiln at school and put dried flowers from the garden into the pots. I gave this to my mom."

- Mia , 1st grade



# **Truckee Elementary School Community Garden**

## **The Project:**

The Truckee Elementary School Garden was first installed through PTO and local area grants in 1990. The original buildout included a creek with a flowing water installation, 12 garden beds, a wooden shade structure, paved pathways to allow all students access, multiple apple trees, and many native shrubs and flowers. In the Spring of 2024 the garden was completely cleared of damaged shrubs, trees and rotten wood material. We have amended the soil and removed all debris. Our next step is to adhere to current fire safety standards so that our school site is in compliance. This will require moving existing garden beds located under the classroom windows and along the edge of the school structure to a distance of 8-10 feet away from the structure. We would then add gravel to the areas surrounding the building for fire mitigation. This work will be done by our school district maintenance crew. Once this work is complete, we will need to replace the old garden irrigation and transition to a waterwise system. We have an estimate from Grateful Gardens detailing all the needed work.

TES teachers and support staff have requested funds every year from the PTO and other local area organizations to rehab the garden. Specific benefits highlighted in previous grant requests include:

- Proven social-emotional benefits of being in nature to help kids regulate and work through “big feelings”
- Use of the garden for ESL (English as a second language) students, SPED (special education) students and TK/Kinder students.
- Scientific applications by the school science teacher (growing plants from seeds, pollinator observations, studying native plants and ecosystems in the Tahoe environment)
- Fertilizing with compost from cafeteria food waste (compost already occurs but gets relocated off-site)
- TK and Kindergarten sensory play area (sand, water, and mud play)

## **Summary of Project Goals:**

- Install the new planter boxes from the Don't Drop the Top grant
- Stain/Repair the broken pergola from Kelly Brother's painting - COMPLETED 5/1/2025
- Install low-flow drip irrigation and amend all beds
- Repurpose old water feature into a dry creek bed and tactile play area
- Plant native plants and some food-oriented plants to support culinary experiences

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- Add decomposed granite and gravel to all walkway areas for student ADA access

### **Partnership:**

The PTO believes the garden rehab project closely aligns with the TDPUD missions regarding water conservation - specifically towards native plants/low flow irrigation and promoting native habitats. In return for funding, the PTO can offer the TDPUD: 1) naming visibility in the garden in the form of plaque, 2) opportunity to send flyers home with students regarding the PUD's specific programming that impacts Truckee, 3) highlighting the partnership on the PTO social media channels as well as the "Cub News" letter from the principal, and 4) logo on the 2025 school year Walk-a-Thon shirt (distributed to all students).

### **Timeline:**

June 2025 - remove plants and soil from defensible space and add gravel.

June 2025 - widen the pathways around the garden beds for ADA compliance and pave with DG (decomposed granite) for surface stability

June 2025 - source labor to install low-flow irrigation, soil amendment, and mulch.

July 2025 - install garden beds and benches. Add native, low water plants to beds.

August 2025 - garden donor plaques to be mounted on a large stone within the garden. Mountain Forge to donate metal signs and install.

### **Estimated Costs and Grant Funds:**

TES Principal Fund Allocation - \$500 IN PROCESS

TES PTO - GRANTED - \$500

Truckee Rotary - GRANTED - \$1000

Don't Drop the Top - GRANTED - \$3,600

Excellence in Education - GRANTED - \$4,200

### **Benches and Garden Boxes Sourced with Don't Drop the Top:**

This program encourages community involvement in residents recycling plastic tops into collection bins throughout the Tahoe Truckee area. Community members can drop #2, #4, and #5 plastic tops and lids in collection bins throughout the Tahoe and Truckee areas. The town can only recycle # 1 and #2 plastics, so they add two additional categories of plastics to this list. A large community sorting event, with over 120 student and community volunteers, is held annually. The plastic from the region is turned into strong plastic lumber to make benches for the community and raised garden boxes.



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Removing the rotted garden beds in preparation for the new installation.





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Before and after images of the TES Community garden area.



Garden area as it is today, May 16, 2025.