

Austin ISD Green School Visioning Contest

Winning Submission from Joseph “JD” Mitchell, Guerrero Thompson Elementary School



To quote the late great Mr. Rogers, ‘You can grow ideas in the Garden of your mind.’ I think nothing is more sustainable than this idea. On our 3 year old campus, this means utilizing the unused spaces around our school and transforming them into something that the students can perpetuate through the future.

Personally, it meant building a vegetable garden, in late fall, a time when little beyond radishes and bitter greens can grow.

Our campus Green Committee began planning a garden build day. We wanted 8 vegetable beds for our campus. We ordered cinderblocks, soil, got seeds donated, and picked a Saturday to drag our already hard working teachers in for a morning of hard, sweaty work. We even contacted Chipotle who generously agreed to donate 50 burritos!

Even with all this, I expected a turn out of ten, maybe twelve people, (the Green Committee and their spouses) but as the day warmed up, more and more people arrived. Five trickled to ten, ten swelled to fifteen, and soon a torrent of over twenty-five people were stacking bricks,

shoveling dirt and carting wheelbarrows. We actually finished early, and had the briefest of moments to lean on our shovels or sit on a cinder block and admire all our hard work before we enjoyed a lunch of magical vanishing burritos.

It was a magical day, made only better by the flood of students I saw the next week in the garden. Every grade level planted seeds. Tiny sprouts of cilantro, spinach, sugar snap peas, radish and broccoli soon poked their leaflets up in our new garden.

Now, I know that this garden will never feed our school of 700 students. We'd be lucky to give every kid a radish! But building these simple beds in which the students learn and grow goes so much further to a sustainable future than teaching the life cycle of plants and filling bellies with wholesome organic good.

Every seed planted in that garden is an idea awakened, a step closer to understanding the world around us. Every bitter radish bite is a peek into the unknown, a foray into a world made of our own hands. And for us, the adults who scraped their hands and got their jeans dirty, it's a reminder that by coming together for just a few hours we can make a more sustainable world for those we all work so hard to help grow.

I've never been in a position like this, part of the team of people standing at the very beginning of a new school, the first ever to plant seeds in fresh earth. I can't wait to rush into the future and see what ideas this community of gardeners will plant in the minds of the future. I'm sure it will be nothing short of spectacular, though in truth, I'd settle for radish salad.