

# [***-Marathon Petroleum Corporation - Gardens bloom again as children connect to nature***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:66D0-WPD1-JD3Y-Y3TY-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

A school's community garden was once a blossoming outdoor classroom where students could learn about nature and growing food.

When COVID-19 sent teachers and students home for long periods of time, the garden beds dried up and became overgrown with weeds.

'The three garden areas we had on campus were a very special place for our students and staff,' said Jeremy Macahilig, the program coordinator for the Expanded Learning Program at Holbrook Language Academy in Concord, California. 'During the pandemic, the gardens went under the radar. People could not be on campus consistently, and now it is a lot of work bringing them back.'

Now that students and teachers are back on campus full-time, the gardens are getting some much-needed attention supported by several partnerships. Marathon's Martinez Renewable Fuels facility gave a $ 10,000 grant to Holbrook for its community garden project where students learn to grow fruits, vegetables and flowers.

The Gardens at Heather Farm, a nonprofit public garden and education center, received a $ 35,000 grant to support its programs that benefit 20,000 students a year. Marathon then connected the two organizations to help further their missions and make a bigger impact in the lives of the students.

'Marathon is providing the school with a grant, which enables us to bring our programs to the campus and help inspire the teachers and students,' said Joan Lucchese, Executive Director of the Gardens at Heather Farm. 'We can help keep those gardens supported with education and seasonal training. We know there is a huge need for this.'

Over the past 50 years, The Gardens at Heather Farm has seen first-hand how important it is to teach children about nature. It is open to the public and provides educational programs for children and adults on its 6.5 acres of gardens.

'It's important for sustainability. Having kids watch a garden grow and see pollinators come to the garden gives them a solid concrete example of why this is important to our ***environment***,' said Lucchese. 'We've seen it time and time again in our children's program. They connect with nature in a personal way, and they start getting curious. You can see that, and it really causes them to stop and think about what they need to do to take care of it.'

Last school year, students from Holbrook visited The Gardens at Heather Farm to learn about different pollinators, how Native Americans used plants and herbs for medicines and herbal remedies. This school year, The Gardens at Heather Farms will start sending staff to the campus to provide in-person classes for the after-school program.

'The kids love gardening,' said Macahilig. 'They love having a space to disconnect and reconnect with nature. They get to see the start, the finish, and they get to try it. They are stepping out of their comfort zones, and it's amazing to see that as an educator.'

The Holbrook CARES Girl Scouts Troop plans to build a greenhouse on campus as part of their Higher Award project to protect their plants during winter. Students will be able to grow fruits and vegetables and host a market stand to sell the produce to the community.

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