

Study finds value in school-garden programs

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FirstLine public charter schools in New Orleans utilize school-garden programming in their curriculum. (Photos from of ESYNOLA)

School-based kitchen garden programs across the country are known to improve healthy eating habits among school children, but their value had not been quantified using research methods until now.

[Evaluation of Edible Schoolyard New Orleans \(ESYNOLA\)](#), coordinated by the Tulane Prevention Research Center (PRC), sought to evaluate how the whole school community – students, families, teachers and neighbors – can participate in the growing, harvesting and sharing of food as a means of improving community health.

The results were published in the [Health Promotion Practice](#) journal.

Founded in 2006, [ESYNOLA](#) works to change the way children eat, learn and live at FirstLine public charter schools in New Orleans. ESYNOLA envisions generations of New Orleans children who have healthy relationships with food, themselves and their community.

“Throughout the arc of our 12 years of programming, there has been a lot of time to grow and expand to where we are now – one of the largest programs of this kind in the nation,” said Kerrie Partridge, program director at ESYNOLA. “Ultimately, the information from focus groups confirmed – in a methodical way – what we see every day.”

“This program could be a promising strategy for influencing social and environmental factors in communities,” said Megan Knapp, Tulane PRC assistant director and lead author on the paper. “Engaging in evaluation is important for fostering community and financial support for programs like this.”

Partridge believes this is a step toward understanding the layers of effectiveness of this type of program.

“Right now, there are pockets of research around school-based gardens and culinary programming, but we're lacking formal evaluation of social outcomes such as the perceptions of our community,” she said.

Perceptions from parents, teachers and students showed the opportunity for social interaction, hands-on learning, and how students influence change at home. Through the students, this kind of experiential learning can impact their families.