

## Children who garden eat more greens

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Students at a FirstLine charter school in New Orleans learn to slice and dice fresh vegetables in a kitchen skills class as part of the Edible Schoolyard New Orleans program. (Photo by Matthew Noel)

Schools that offer gardening and cooking classes are seeing results with students eating more fruits and vegetables than their peers, according to findings from the Tulane [Prevention Research Center](#) (PRC), a unit of the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

The [Edible Schoolyard New Orleans](#) (ESYNOLA), which has garden and kitchen-based programs at five FirstLine charter schools, selected the Tulane PRC to lead an

evaluation of its activities during the 2013-2014 school year. Tulane PRC staff, with the help of three public health graduate students, conducted surveys with students and parents and led focus groups with students, parents and teachers.

The Tulane PRC found that of the students who had ESYNOLA classes, 48 percent reported eating green vegetables the day before, compared to 10 percent nationally. Similarly, 85 percent of ESYNOLA students reported eating fruit, compared to 61 percent nationally.

The evaluation has helped ESYNOLA further plan its program and how to measure and track the impact on children and families, said Claudia Barker, executive director of Edible Schoolyard New Orleans.

“Specifically, the evaluation gave us very useful comments from students, parents and teachers about how the program's garden and kitchen classes have increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables and contributed to students' involvement in meal preparation at home,” Barker said.

“Students reported their delight in trying new foods ? like kiwi and pomegranate ? and teachers commented that this sense of adventure will help students make better choices in life.”

According to Carolyn Johnson, PRC director, “Although this was a preliminary evaluation, our ultimate goal is to explore the effectiveness of the teaching and gardening programs in reaching students and parents about healthier eating.

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*Naomi King Englar is the communications and training coordinator for the Prevention Research Center at Tulane University and the Maternal and Child Health Leadership Training Program.*

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