

# LESSON 1

## Making the Case for School Gardening Programs

Imagine if every child in the U.S. was taught to grow food from seed to harvest, if resources were provided to ensure that parents could model these same garden lessons at home, and if gardens were located in nearly every school and community in the country. This is exactly the approach the federal government took in 1917 with the launch of the U.S. School Garden Army (USSGA). This national program was designed to address and reduce concerns that youth living in increasingly urban populations were losing their agricultural roots and to alleviate production pressures placed on farmers to produce food for both the general population and those serving abroad in WWI. This initiative integrated garden education into ALL subject areas and even supported gardening activities at home. By the end of WWI, the USSGA touted several million student members and 13,000 gardens in Los Angeles alone! The idea of school gardens as sites for food production, with important educational benefits, is not a new one.

School garden programs can have many benefits for all parties involved - not just students. Most likely, you're taking this course because you already recognize the benefits to children, but you may not have thought about all the benefits to others, and how your effort can be helped by demonstrating those benefits to potential collaborators. Brainstorming the potential benefits will not only help you focus your goals and effort, but it will help you present the project positively to potential collaborators, participants, funders, etc, with a variety of benefits that might catch their eye. In this lesson we outline potential benefits for various groups of people, and provide a table of great school garden examples in San Diego that you can visit and emulate.

### Learning Objectives

1. Know the various benefits of a school gardening program provides to students and others.
2. Increase your awareness of successful school garden models around San Diego County.

### Benefits

A school garden program is ultimately developed for the benefit of students at the school. Research has shown that school gardens can have many benefits for students, including influencing healthy eating habits, fostering understanding in multiple academic subjects, and cultivating environmental stewardship, self-esteem, improved collaboration skills and responsibility (CSGN 2006; U Colorado 2009). The authors of these two resources and others (see references below) have gathered results from many academic studies on the effects of school gardens, so they are good resources for data of all kinds to support your case.

Additionally, it is valuable to identify how a school garden program supports the efforts of and benefits teachers, administrators, parents, and other community members. Support from each of these groups is necessary to build a strong, sustainable gardening program. You will need to be able to illustrate benefits to each stakeholder group as you recruit support.

### For teachers the garden is:

- An applied learning lab where they can teach subjects in the areas of science, math, social studies, and language arts. The garden is an outdoor classroom to reinforce lessons or apply concepts and ideas learned inside, and help students make connections between disciplines that can seem unrelated. Integration across disciplines has been shown to make learning more meaningful for students (U Colorado 2009). It is also a place for cross-cultural learning (CSGN 2007).
- An opportunity for physical activity. The garden can be a place to get exercise while learning math, science, art, etc. According to an Active Living Research brief, a study found that at schools that increased school-based physical activity time, students had improved grades and test scores, even though less time was spent in the classroom.





- A break from the indoor environment to provide variety during the school day. Garden activities can help teachers break up the school day so students remain motivated, enthusiastic and attentive.
- An opportunity for volunteer teaching assistance. Especially in the case of a joint-use garden, or an involved community partner, teachers benefit from the presence and knowledge of experienced garden volunteers who might also offer opportunities for positive intergenerational learning (U Colorado 2009).
- A positive, productive and often therapeutic space for helping all students, including at-risk and/or special needs students in particular, to learn teamwork and collaboration skills (CSGN 2007).
- A resume-builder. Experience teaching in a school garden can help teachers get future teaching jobs with a garden component.

**For School Administrators the gardening program:**

- Contributes to district educational goals and the development of dynamic and thriving learning environments by providing experiential learning opportunities.
- Contributes to the implementation of a school district's wellness policy. All school districts that participate in the USDA meal program are required to set goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based wellness activities on campus. Many schools are expanding on these district wellness policies to ensure the school environment is a place where students can develop skills for lifelong wellness. The school garden is a natural fit for nutrition education, healthy food promotion, and fun physical activity, all of which are typically included in wellness policies.
- Attracts quality teachers to the school—successful gardens can help attract enthusiastic, wellness-minded teachers to the school. One principal at a Denver Public School with a garden started by Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) commented to DUG that almost all teachers who contact the school for potential jobs mention that they want to teach in the garden.
- Attracts new families, particularly neighborhood families, to enroll in a local school. For parents and families who have an interest in gardening, environmental issues, and/or healthy food, the garden can be their entry point in becoming volunteers and advocates for the school.

- Can be a financial benefit to the school if the garden is attractive to grant and individual funders. In addition, a successful, beautiful garden can improve the overall reputation of the school, which can have positive financial impacts.

**For parents a garden is:**

- A way to get involved with their children's education. Research has shown that parental involvement, which is beneficial for students, is greater at schools with garden programs (U Colorado 2009).
- A safe, healthy place for before- and after-school activities. The garden can be an alternative to otherwise unstructured before and after-school time, helping parents know that their children are safe and in a positive space.



### For community members a garden:

- Creates a space for community education. Schools that allow community gardeners onsite, particularly during school hours, can interact with students and impart their gardening knowledge. Or they might become even more involved and assist teachers more formally. School and community gardeners who garden after school or on weekends educate other community members about food production methods, composting and a host of other gardening topics.
- Provides a beautiful neighborhood attraction. The school garden can be a source of beauty and pride for a neighborhood; a place to gather and build relationships with neighbors. It can even help reduce crime by encouraging a positive outdoor presence by community members.
- Provides land for growing food. Joint-use gardens (details in Lesson 5) provide community members with a safe place to grow food and an opportunity to invest in the community. For community groups looking for a community garden space, schools often provide a very attractive option.



### ACTIVITY 1

**Allow time for a brainstorming session on the additional benefits of school gardening programs.**

### Successful San Diego School Garden Examples

There are numerous school gardens across the county of San Diego and many of these gardens have stood the test of time. Often this is because the garden “champions,” enthusiastic parents and/or teachers who started the gardens, were able to build relationships and create systems for sustainability. In San Diego County, there are several common elements in a successful gardening program:

- Partnerships with community organizations such as the San Diego Master Gardeners, Solana Center for Environmental Innovation, International Rescue Committee, local garden clubs, etc.
- Strong parental involvement and support through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)
- Active involvement of multiple teachers using the garden for academic subjects
- Strong administrative support, particularly from the principal
- Inclusion of the garden in the school district’s wellness policy

There are several resources for learning more about the commonalities in a successful garden project. The supplement “Plant good people and cultivate relationships: How school gardens sustain their programs” by Diana Bergman provides local examples of some of the relationships that have helped sustain gardening programs across the county. Additionally, below is a list of exemplary San Diego County-based school gardens. It provides a brief description of successful garden programs and the organizer’s contact information. Visiting and seeing what other schools have done in space utilization, plant choices, and programming is one of the best ways to get ideas for your school gardening program. It is strongly encouraged that you take field trips to visit other sites! The San Diego Master Gardeners School Program web site also provides photos of existing school programs and resources for school gardeners: [www.mastergardenerssandiego.org/schools/schools.php](http://www.mastergardenerssandiego.org/schools/schools.php).

San Diego County-based school garden examples:

SCHOOL	LOCATION	CONTACT	FEATURES
Albert Einstein Academy	3035 Ash St San Diego, CA 92102	Terri Oelrich-Hughes (619) 795-1190	Strong with nutrition and wellness messaging. Seasonal vegetable areas, orchard, native plants, art in the garden, garden integrated into school wellness policy
Birney Elementary School	4545 Campus Drive, San Diego, CA 92104	Mindy Swanson, (619) 294-5811, mindysue@igc.org	With two orchards, native plant area, butterfly gardens, composting and several raised bed areas school has great examples of gardening on campus. Birney has pioneered garden to cafeteria in San Diego Unified School District, teaches garden during the school day to K-3 and runs afterschool garden club.
Explorer Elementary Charter School	2230 Truxtun Road San Diego/Point Loma, CA 92106	Cindy Jenson-Elliott (619) 398-8600	Actively integrated into the curriculum for early grades, specifically for science but also social studies and language arts. Good website and blog: <a href="http://www.explorerelementary.org/garden.htm">www.explorerelementary.org/garden.htm</a>
Grant Elementary	1425 Washington Place San Diego, CA 92103	Shirley Demer/ Dave Martocchio (619) 293-4420	Located in Mission Hills, a neighborhood with a strong garden reputation, garden is integrated into classroom for science – and has particularly good composting program (large worm bin created with help of Solana Center for Environmental Innovation)
La Paloma	300 Heald Lane Fallbrook, CA 92028	Nanette Noonan (760) 731-4220	Garden Club run by Fallbrook Garden Club. Garden club also helps apply for grants and helps teachers integrate garden based learning into the classroom. Excellent examples of art in the garden.
Buena Vista	1330 Buena Vista Way Carlsbad, CA 92008	Dolores Fangon (760) 331-5400	Garden used as reward and site for literacy work. The garden champion is a former teacher and grows a unique mix of cultural foods including yam, sugar cane and chayote.
Alamosa Park	5130 Alamosa Park Drive Oceanside, CA 92057	Nancy Jones (760) 940-0007	Avid composter and former parent gardener continues to run organized garden club and integrate garden with annuals and perennials into classroom. Excellent use of space and outdoor classroom management. Garden Champion has also been instrumental in getting other schools support for their gardens.



SCHOOL	LOCATION	CONTACT	FEATURES
Solana Santa Fe	6570 El Apajo Rancho Santa Fe, CA 92067	Peggy Kenney (858) 794-4700	Garden has areas for each grade to explore various subjects using garden based learning. Garden Coordinator is Master Gardener who is paid by PTO to care for garden and open it up during recess for students to enjoy. The garden has beautiful signage (parent with sign company) and now a greenhouse!
Crawford High School	4191 Colts Way City Heights, CA 92115	Michelle Raymond (619) 583-2500	Garden created and supported through a partnership with the International Rescue Committee. Students receive service learning credits and/or a stipend when participating in the after school garden club or garden internship. Food from garden has been integrated into the cafeteria. The garden club works with the cafeteria staff to compost 100-150 lbs of salad bar leftovers every week, reducing waste and trash pick-up cost.
Ocean Knoll Elementary	910 Melba Road Encinitas, CA 92024	Natalie Bruey (760) 525-4997	Good example of building garden through asking broadly for donations and support. Well integrated into the school day using garden based learning and parent support for teacher garden time.
VIP Village Preschool	1001 Fern Ave. Imperial Beach, CA 91932-2199	Jeanette Zimmerman (619) 628-8690	Great garden that gives students a place to explore. Garden Champion is a tireless fundraiser and also a teacher with brilliant ideas of how to make the garden a place to explore – a digging area is one of the features.
Hamilton Elementary	2807 Fairmount Ave. San Diego, CA 92105	Jessie Wallace (619) 262-2483	Habitat restoration and garden build conducted with the community partner formerly known as Aquatic Adventures.
Vista La Mesa Elementary	3900 Violet St. Lemon Grove, CA 91941	Craig Johnson (619) 825-5645	Garden grew from California School Yard Garden Grants with Champion teacher and support of others. Large space provides opportunity for classroom teachers to apply garden based learning and after school program to enjoy the harvest.
Rosa Parks	4510 Landis St. San Diego, CA 92105	Candace Goss 619 282-6803 x 2113	Located in separately fenced area and supported by parents and community volunteers this garden is called “community garden” and it includes a large space for growing, teaching area with shade sails, sinks for cleaning produce and hands, and composting, which uses food scraps from the cafeteria.



## References

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