



Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: School Gardens in the School Environment

Title

In just under two years the NEOP classroom nutrition education is expanding and contagiously spreading into other areas of the school culture including; the cafeteria and school gardens, with the newest addition of efforts intertwining into the community.

Intervention Summary

Building and sustaining school gardens has increased familiarity and access to fruits and vegetable during the school year. It has been an essential part of a bountiful and synergistic program in the Lake County school system.

The interventions include the NEOP program partnering with 13 eligible school sites to train teachers to teach nutrition education including Building Healthy Habits, Nourish, and reinforced with Harvest of the Month local food taste testing. The program has expanded to 178 teachers reaching approximately 5,300 students each month.

This comprehensive program would not be successful without key partners like the four district food service directors. They have agreed to market and implement the Harvest of the Month in the school lunches and on salad bars to align efforts in the classroom. The Farm to School Grant has been working with food service directors to increase purchasing of local produce from Lake County farmers. The goal is to have the HOTM locally sourced in the cafeteria.

To support garden produce, the Middletown School District foodservice director has added the school garden into the fiscal budget! This will financially support the school gardens and bring some light to the salad bar with school garden produce! For this to become a reality the gardens also had to endure protocols through the Environmental Health Department. With their success the garden experts can train other schools at the Lake County School Garden Collaborative meeting.

Establishing consistent messaging in the gardens is part of the approach. The seven schools with gardens are working towards integrating garden education from NEOP approved curriculums and growing produce coinciding with the local HOTM schedule. The Lake County NEOP program is supporting 7 school gardens to reinforce nutrition education messaging, increase life skills, and introduce food literacy components. During the summer Lake Counties NEOP program hired a garden employee to work to sustain school gardens during the summer months, allowing the gardens a jump start for the school year.

In conclusion the program dives even further into the community. A non-profit agency has reported hearing from several parents that knowing how to access HOTM in stores would be a useful tool. The PICH grant along with DSS SNAP-Ed has decided to partner and work on these efforts on improving access and promotion of HOTM at grocery stores around Lake County.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

Local procurement in the school cafeterias is a barrier in Lake County due to supply from the local farmers and access to an ordering system that is user friendly. The Lake County Food Hub is the solution; with the goal of building capacity between food service directors and local farmers. It is a brand new program, so time will tell!

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

A single short term goal for this PSE is to continue support of the 7 school gardens and help to integrating the garden as part of the school culture.

Long term goals include other Lake County Districts following the Middletown Unified School District model of staffing a garden teacher to bring all students to the garden at least one time per month. In addition to encourage food service directors to budget for school garden produce, to increase financial support for school gardens.

Contact information about this Narrative

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