

Environmental Influences on the Effectiveness of School Garden Programs

Farm-to-School (FTS) programs have become increasingly popular as schools seek to address rising obesity rates and encourage healthy eating behaviors in students. School gardens, in which students help to grow produce and use the produce in school meals or taste tests, form an important component of many FTS programs.

While existing literature has examined the perceptions and reactions of students, there has been far less research conducted on the roles of the adults connected with school gardens or other FTS programs, even though these individuals are central to the programs' existence and implementation.

This study adds to the discussion by investigating the perceptions of schoolteachers, staff, and administrators at schools with school gardens. Data is being collected through self-administered online surveys and analyzed through the Social Cognitive Theory framework, focusing on the environmental construct, which includes influences such as encouragement and role modeling.

Survey responses are then being compared with the results of the student surveys on school gardens to determine whether there is a relationship between the school environment and the impacts of the school garden program on students. The results of this study are aimed to provide school garden advocates and practitioners a better understanding of how to most effectively incorporate school gardens within their schools.