School gardens and school-based nutrition interventions have become increasingly popular tools in the effort to encourage healthy eating behaviors for schoolchildren. This study examines changes in indicators of healthy eating behaviors after participation in one year of a school garden-based nutrition intervention program. This study also investigates how environmental factors may potentially influence the effects of the program on students.

Analysis is guided by the Social Cognitive Theory framework and utilizes three years of data collection and evaluation of the American Heart Association’s Teaching Gardens project by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont. Using matched pairs of 142 students and adult insight from eight elementary schools located across the country, this study builds off previous school garden research literature through a focus on students’ socioeconomic status. This study then adds a consideration of the level of integration of the program within the broader school environment, with the hypothesis that a more well integrated garden-based nutrition intervention will correlate with more positive learning results from participation in the program.

Results are still being examined, but initial findings suggest that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experience more positive results after participation in the school garden-based nutrition intervention program. Adding the program’s level of integration within the school to the model strengthens these findings significantly, suggesting that this environmental variable should be included in the evaluation of the effectiveness of a school garden program.