

Fruit and Vegetable Intake and Garden-Based Learning in Elementary-Aged Students Participating in Orange County Alternative Education

Background

- At least 40% of 5th Graders in Orange County were considered overweight or obese in 2017 (Let's get Healthy California, 2023).
- Obesity in childhood can put children at a higher risk of developing chronic conditions, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (McCrinkle, 2015; Rankin et al, 2012).
- California children with low family income are at a higher risk of developing obesity, low family income is disproportionately high among Hispanic/Latino populations (Jin & Jones-Smith, 2015)
- Garden-based learning can impact students' perception of fruit and vegetable consumption while improving other health-related outcomes (Schultz & Rosen, 2022).
- Students from underserved and underrepresented communities may stand the most to gain from the connection to community, culture, food, and nature provided by garden learning (Nocella et al, 2016; Pevec, 2016; Block et al, 2015).

Purpose

The program aims to:

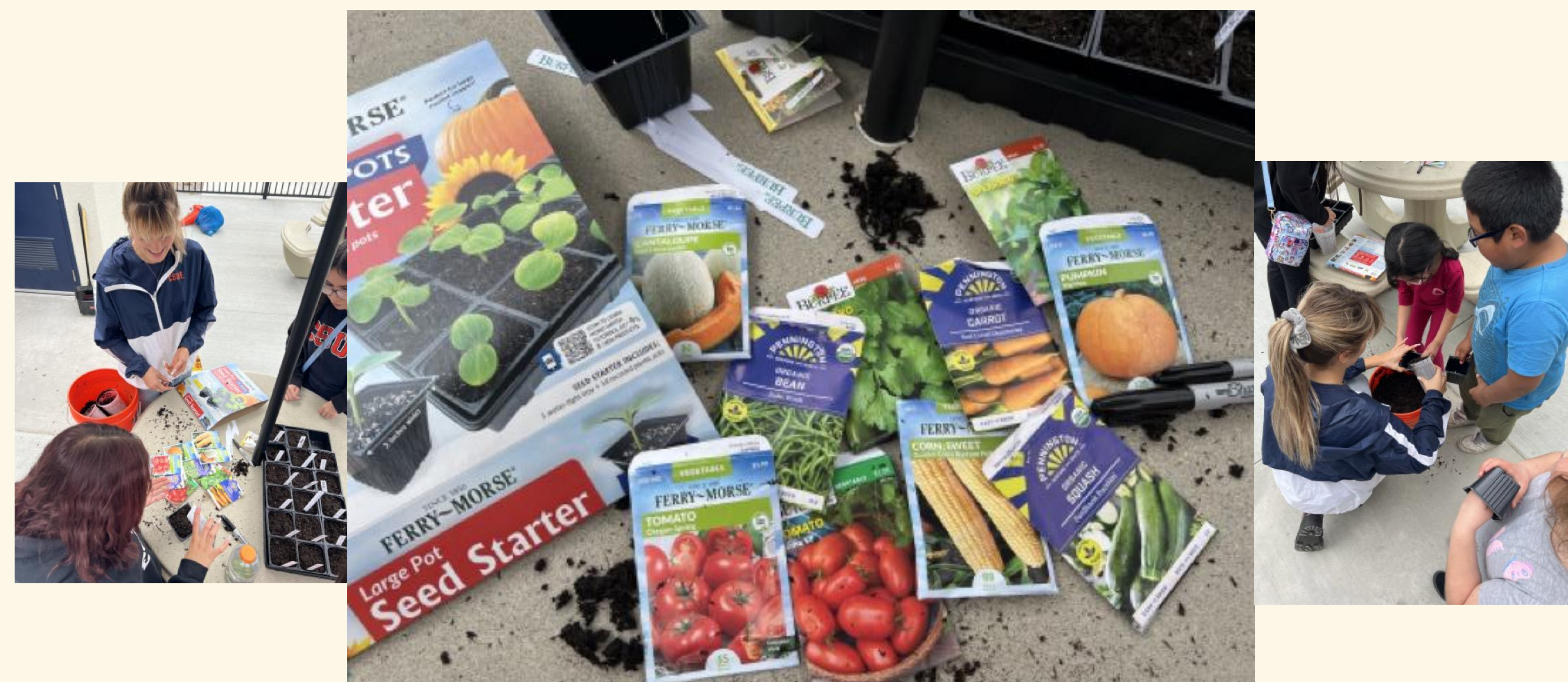
- Address childhood obesity in at-risk youth throughout Northern and Central Orange County by organizing garden-based learning at Skyview School in Anaheim.
- Create an appreciation and understanding among students of how fruits and vegetables are grown.
- Empower students to choose fruits and vegetables that excite them and are important to them.
- Create a garden community among school staff, students, and parents.

Activities

- Developed relationship with Skyview School (OC Alternative Education Site for home-insecure youth K-8th grade) and OC Dept of Education, in order to implement garden learning into school curriculum.
- Researched school-garden programs and presented concept idea to Skyview and district administrators.
- Worked with school educators and other staff to begin building lesson plan on culture, nutrition, and sustainable agriculture to introduce garden concepts and build positive attitudes toward fruit and vegetable consumption.
- Implemented interactive, hands-on planting activity with Skyview students (small planter boxes/pots).
- Continue to work with the district and school-garden planning committee to successful implement a large raised-bed campus garden (slated for Spring 2024).

Outcomes

- Adoption of school-garden concept and plan by Skyview and OC Dept of Education administrators
- Became an established member of on-going School-Garden planning committee
- Increased interest and excitement of campus garden among Skyview students and staff through implementation of hands-on, gardening activities
- Provided students' a basic understanding of gardening fundamentals (water, soil, sunlight...) through garden activity and instruction



Conclusion

- There is clear evidence of interest and excitement for a school garden among Skyview administrators, teachers and students.

Lessons learned-

- Working with large governing organizations (OC Dept. of Education) takes an extended period of time to get approval from various levels of administrators.
- In addition, these large bureaucratic systems have extensive policies and protocols that need to be followed.
- Building relationships and support is critical to the success of a collaborative campus garden program.

Acknowledgements

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References

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