

University of South Florida Healthy Schools Project
The iNSiGHT Cooperative, a Division of Tait Martin Enterprises
Inc.

School Garden Project

Action Plan

May 2010

Introduction

This action plan is a culmination of the Florida Department of Education Fruit and Vegetable School Garden Project 2009-2010 work plan (*available at the end of this document*) and the Partnership Meeting held on April 23, 2010. It brings together ideas from statewide stakeholders and best practices from those already doing school garden programs.

The action plan will focus on tasks at both the state and local level. It should be seen as a “living” document – one that can be added to as the program grows or adapted to individual school systems. Primarily, the action plan is a starting point for dialogue and a tool for stakeholders to envision gardening programs in their schools and communities.

From a state perspective, the Office of Healthy Schools and Food and Nutrition Management has made significant headway in meeting its year one program goal:

The State Education Agency (SEA) will develop a state-level structure that supports the implementation of Fruit and Vegetable School Gardens as part of the Coordinated School Health (CSH) model.

Although noteworthy progress has been made, there is still much to do. During the Partner Meeting, the participants were asked, “**In your opinion, what is the most important issue in implementing a school garden program?**” They were allowed to anonymously text their answers. The following is a list of the responses to this question:

- **Value (showing why the program is valuable)**
- **Teacher support**
- **Sustained leadership**
- **Money**
- **Time!**
- **Empower children with sustainable education**
- **Sustainability**
- **Administrative support**
- **Resources!**

This action plan will seek to address these issues. The following pages will specifically focus on seven important areas brought up during the Partner Meeting and in previous conversations with program staff. The seven areas of the plan are:

- **Resource Availability**
- **Educational Impact**
- **Partnership Opportunities**
- **Advocacy Channels**
- **Timelines**
- **Program Sustainability**
- **Evaluation Expectations**

Each section will begin with a brief description of the issue and move to “action items” - accomplishable tasks for those either at the state or local level. Again, the reader should understand that all “action items” may not translate to their individual programs or school districts. A goal of this plan is to inspire specific tasks that can be developed to meet their individual local needs.

Resource Availability

Resource availability was a common thread throughout the planning meeting. It is a reality that the default thought for most educators and administrators is to think of “dollars and staff” when presented with a new program idea. But what other resources are available to make gardening programs in schools a reality?

The meeting stakeholders were asked the question, “**What resources are you "connected" to?**” They anonymously answered the following:

- **Interested students, administrators, and parents**
- **Knowledge**
- **Administrative support**
- **Parent and teacher support**
- **Help from master gardeners from extension**
- **Community partners**
- **Network of state lands and scientists**
- **EPA station and extension personnel**
- **Support from multiple departments within the agency**
- **Gardening knowledge and materials**

They were then asked, **“What resources do you want or need?”** Participants anonymously answered the following:

- **Space and materials to garden**
- **Curriculum, gardening added as a "specials" class**
- **Staff time to follow up with and train teachers**
- **Rachael Ray to come cook!**
- **Integrate into urban areas and on-site teaching opportunities**
- **Teaching portable kitchen**
- **More cohesive approach so efforts are not duplicated**
- **Be able to have watering systems to help keep gardens going, especially on school breaks**
- **Teaching kitchen**
- **Money; more funding**

These answers give a good starting point to look at action items for resources. While money and time may not be abundant to start a school gardening program, one plus that educators have on their side is the ability to be resourceful. As one teacher put it during the planning meeting:

“Our gardening program works because we integrate into what we already do. And, we’re organic because we cannot afford pesticides or store bought fertilizers.”

Action Items:

- Think beyond dollars – determine what resources specifically are needed to implement a school gardening program in your area.
- On the state level, give guidelines on the resources necessary to begin a typical school garden program. Realize that minimal resources will likely encourage more people to participate.
- Develop a clearinghouse of current school gardening resources that is easy to get to – bring the information to the educators. Even if the information is “on the web,” create a page where all links are in one spot.
- Develop a network of master “teacher” gardeners (*people who are doing this already*) to give advice to others wanting to do gardening in schools. This could also be a speakers’ bureau for the program.
- Collect information from all grant outlets and put them in one spot. In addition, adopt common language that can be used in the grant proposals.

- To spur easy adoption of school gardening programs, encourage teachers to integrate other programs that are already out there – for example “Seed to Soup” – until they are ready to create their own program.
- Increase the number of school gardening starter kits given to schools. Look for retail and community sponsors to defer costs:
 - Wal-Mart
 - Target
 - Lowes
 - Home Depot
 - Winter Park Health Foundation
 - Florida Farm Bureau
 - Florida Ag in the Classroom

Florida Department of Education Fruit and Vegetable School Garden Project 2009-2010 work plan action items:

- Objective 2, Activity 2: By June 30, 2010 identify fruit and vegetable school garden grant funding opportunities.
- Objective 2, Activity 3: By June 30, 2010 apply for at least two state level school gardening grants.
- Objective 2, Activity 4: By June 30, 2010 adapt the existing Building a Healthy School Success Story database to include school garden best practices.

Educational Impact

The main question here is, **“How does gardening in schools connect with student learning?”** The meeting participants were in agreement that school gardens have to be directly linked to learning. As one teacher put it:

“If you think you are going to have a garden without curriculum integration, don’t waste your time.”

They key is to find links that show a correlation between school garden and learning, parental involvement, increased test scores and decreased disciplinary problems – all of which were cited as benefits of school gardening during the meeting.

Action Items:

- Directly connect school gardening with Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. Some of the teachers in attendance at the Planning Meeting mentioned they had already done this. State representatives should compile these and make them available to teachers and administrators.
- Create an FCAT study guide based on gardening principles. Again, some teachers mentioned that this was being done on the classroom level, but not statewide.
- Create a searchable database of classroom exercises that teachers could use when implementing school gardens in their classes.
- Create an educators' chat room/Facebook page where teachers could exchange ideas about what is working in the classroom.
- Develop a mentorship program in the counties for teachers who want to incorporate school gardening in their curriculum.
- Coordinate a statewide contest for the most unique ideas that link gardening to various curriculum areas – for example, reading, physics, math, etc.

Partnership Opportunities

One of the consistent threads that linked all of the educators utilizing school gardens was their ability to partner with other – whether in their schools or community. The main question here is, **“Who do we need to bring to the table to implement school gardening in Florida?”** Meeting participants listed the following as important partners in developing a statewide gardening program:

- **Parents**
- **Businesses in each school zone**
- **Nutritionists**
- **The person who adds it the curriculum as a "special" (who is that person or people)**
- **City and county elected officials**
- **FFA**
- **4-H**
- **Florida Farm Bureau**
- **Grocery stores**
- **Researchers**
- **Local home and garden stores**
- **Community organizations**
- **PTA/PTO**

- **National garden association and Rodale organic garden**
- **Local farmers**
- **Superintendents and school boards**

This list is far from being complete. Educators should look locally to see who specifically they could bring to the table to help implement their school gardens.

Action Items:

- Develop a document that outlines the expectations of being a partner – What will partnering entail? This can be used to recruit potential partners at the state and local level.
- Develop a database of partners on the state level of current and prospective program partners.
- Contact state government organizations with local branches to help with the program. Specifically, reach out to the Water Management Districts, Department of Environmental Protection and the Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) at the University of Florida.
- Locally, develop a list of potential partners in the school’s area. Be sure to include:
 - Retail organizations – Wal-Mart, Target, Lowes, Home Depot and local garden and feed stores
 - Community people – farmers, retirees, parents
 - Teachers in the school to collaborate with
 - Auxiliary personnel at school – janitors, cafeteria workers

Advocacy Channels

In order to plant school gardening in the minds of decision-makers and the student curriculum, advocates have to begin by telling why and how gardening can make an impact.

Participants were asked, “**What else do we need to be doing when it comes to school gardening?**” They anonymously answered:

- **This movement needs a strong public image**
- **Speakers bureau for garden education and teacher education**
- **Connect environmental education to gardening**
- **Board of education updates on what is going on in school gardens in the district**
- **Show pictures - this can help other schools see what can be done**
- **Concentrated PR effort**

- **Educate and inform teachers**
- **Create a fun, easy, popular, realistic, inspiring mission statement... Perhaps along with a slogan and have some public service ads on TV**
- **Garden open house for the community**
- **Training program for teachers**
- **Leadership training conference**
- **Solidify broad partnerships and define goals**
- **NPR coverage**
- **Community garden blog in creative loafing**
- **Media attention**
- **Elevator speech**

It is evident that stakeholders are passionate about school gardening. The key for advocacy success will be to ensure everyone is delivering the same message.

Action Items:

- Construct an “elevator speech” about school gardening. This is a short, compelling statement about why it is important.
- Develop a statewide campaign for school gardening. Bring in partners at the state and local level to help build the brand and campaign components.
- Partner with your School Board Community Affairs Departments – they are always looking to share stories of academic and school success with the media. In addition, they are also the main contacts with your local media. Do not contact the press without contacting Community Affairs first.
- Document your local gardening programs with pictures, journals and videos. Post these to a website and share the link. Be sure to get parental permission before sharing any photos of children.
- Use a speakers’ bureau of master “teacher” gardeners (*people who are doing this already*) to present to local community groups.
- Develop retail partnerships and highlight the garden program in their stores.
- Give verbal “progress reports” to local school boards highlighting the successes of the program.

Florida Department of Education Fruit and Vegetable School Garden Project 2009-2010 work plan action items:

- Objective 2, Activity 5: By June 30, 2010 present at least five fruit and vegetable school garden promotional sessions at state and regional conferences and workshops.

Timelines

The initial timeline to have a gardening program in every school within three years is very doable. The key to this will be to determine what a “school gardening program” entails.

Action Items:

- Create a document that shows how easy it is to develop a gardening program. Make it as easy as possible for any teacher to incorporate this into his/her curriculum.
- Work with local school personnel to determine a timeline that works for each school. This could be accomplished by gardening mentors or state education staff.

Program Sustainability

The main question regarding sustainability is, **“How do we keep the school gardening program going once it’s started?”** This sentiment was seen as a major concern with the stakeholders. Many thought that funding and partnerships were the answer to the sustainability question. If this is the case, school gardening professionals should focus much of their time in these two areas.

Action Items:

- Ensure partnerships at the state and local level. Use them for funding and technical assistance.
- On the local level, determine how the garden will be sustained when school is not in session. Ideas that surfaced during the planning meeting were to utilize retirees, year-round school personnel, and parent volunteers.
- Develop a plan to sustain your garden with little to no funding. This will allow you to continue the program even if financial resources are not available.

- Develop a plan to sell your produce to teachers and parents in order to create an income.
- On the state level, get a sponsor that will supply materials to local schools in exchange for publicity – candidates include seed companies, large retailers, commercial farms, etc.

Evaluation Expectations

The stakeholders cited “evaluation” as a key need in the implementation of this program. As one participant stated, **“What gets measured, gets noticed.”**

To date, there is not a standardized evaluation tool for school gardening programs. In fact, there is not a standard definition of what constitutes a school gardening program. It is strongly suggested that as the program grows at the state level, a standardized evaluation component be added to the program tasks.

Action Items:

- Officially define, from a state level, what encompasses a “school garden.”
- Establish a baseline of school gardening by determining the number of schools who have a gardening program based on the state definition.
- Create a standardized evaluation matrix from the state level to make sure everyone is measuring common items. This will not only make it easier for educators to know what exactly needs to be evaluated, it will allow the state to get statewide and regional data.
- Determine a way to easily collect qualitative and quantitative data. Make the data available for participants to use in grant requests and funding opportunities. Include pictures, stories and “number” data.
- Highlight the program yearly by producing a data rich annual report of Florida’s school gardens and present it to the governor, state superintendent and county superintendents.
- Develop a statewide award for school gardening that rewards schools and districts based on the following:
 - Scope of the program;
 - Cost effectiveness of the program;
 - Percentage of teachers utilizing the program in the schools; and
 - Number of partnerships

Conclusion

In closing, the key to a successful program will be a balance of statewide support and local participation. As stated in the Planning Meeting, most behavior can be changed by making something “fun, easy and popular” – school gardening is no exception.

Fun:

- Highlight ways that students and teachers can enjoy the learning process through gardening.
- Focus both on the fun for the teacher and the student.

Easy:

- Provide materials to teachers to show exactly how the incorporation of school gardening can enhance learning while still meeting the demands of the curriculum and standardized tests.
- Emphasize that school gardening can be done by educators of any subject and with little resources.

Popular:

- Emphasize those educators and school systems that are already doing this. Show their successes – test score increases, disciplinary decreases, enjoyment of teaching, etc.
- Spotlight teachers who have incorporated school gardening into their curriculum on statewide media like program brochures and websites.
- Make school gardening “trendy” by underscoring the impact it has had on the people who are doing it.

Good luck with this important work.

Florida Department of Education Fruit and Vegetable School Garden Project
Office of Healthy Schools and Food and Nutrition Management
Work Plan 2009-2010

1 Year Goal: The State Education Agency (SEA) will develop a state-level structure that supports the implementation of Fruit and Vegetable School Gardens as part of the Coordinated School Health (CSH) model.

Objective 1: By September 30, the Program Coordinator will have established a partnership with at least five state agencies or organizations to build capacity to develop fruit and vegetable school gardens.

- Activity 1: By June 30, 2009 implement and analyze fruit and vegetable school garden baseline survey. (Completed)
- Activity 2: By July 30, 2009 identify potential partners and determine level of commitment and resources available to support school gardens. (Completed)
- Activity 3: By August 30, 2009 bring partners together to develop a promotion and sustainability strategic plan. (Completed)
- Activity 4: By September 30, 2009 develop a fruit and vegetable school garden specific web page housed under both FLDOE Office of Healthy Schools and FLDOE Food and Nutrition Management site (Completed)
- Activity 5: By September 30, 2009 develop a schedule of fruit and vegetable school garden monthly promotions for the school year. (Completed)

Objective 2: By June 30, 2010, the Program Coordinator will have established a partnership with at least five state agencies and/or organizations to build capacity to sustain vegetable and fruit school gardens.

- Activity 1: By December 30, 2009 correlate fruit and vegetable school garden concepts to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. (Completed)
- Activity 2: By June 30, 2010 identify fruit and vegetable school garden grant funding opportunities. (Completed)
- Activity 3: By June 30, 2010 apply for at least two state level school gardening grants.
- Activity 4: By June 30, 2010 adapt the existing Building a Healthy School Success Story database to include school garden best practices.
- Activity 5: By June 30, 2010 present at least five fruit and vegetable school garden promotional sessions at state and regional conferences and workshops. (Completed 3 out of 5)

Dr. Tait Martin, Meeting Facilitator and Action Plan Author

Dr. Tait Martin is the president and CEO of *The iNSiGHT Cooperative*, a national network of researchers and industry experts that helps clients focus their outreach messages, build stronger relationships and develop programs that better define the way they reach the people who matter to them. In addition, Tait is a speaker for CAMPUSPEAK, the nation's premier agency for college speakers, and an Affiliate Professor of Social Marketing and Research in the Department of Family and Community Health at the University of South Florida.

A winner of some of the industry's most prestigious awards (including the Emmy®, Silver Anvil® and Gold Addy®), Tait's seventeen years as a research, communication and marketing professional have included stints as vice president of the national social marketing and advertising firm, Salter>Mitchell; faculty member at four top-tier higher education institutions; communication director for one of the largest United Way organizations in Louisiana; spokesperson for a major state government agency in Florida; marketing consultant to several industry and professional organizations; and a morning radio talk show host.

Widely cited in both academic and applied research circles, Tait holds a Ph.D. in Communication Theory and Research (emphasis in persuasion and cognitive processing) from Florida State University, as well as a Masters in Organizational and Interpersonal Communication from the University of Louisiana. His undergraduate degree in public relations is from Northwestern State University.

Tait is often tapped by organizations around the country to facilitate work sessions and strategic planning meetings. His down-to-earth and humorous approach creates an environment of dialogue and development rarely found in meeting facilitators. In addition to his facilitation, Tait's research skills span both qualitative and quantitative methods including survey design and implementation; focus group moderation; ethnographies; in-depth interviewing; social science experiments and quasi-experiments; and advanced quantitative analysis (e.g. ANOVA, regression and general linear modeling).

To date, Tait has conducted hundreds of projects and presentations about research, social marketing, organizational development and communication to clients ranging from international corporations and local nonprofit organizations to government agencies and higher education institutions. Specifically, his work focuses on health, education, safety and environmental sustainability.

Tait can be contacted at (888) 321-6938 or taitmartin@insightcoop.com.