

The Edible Schoolyard New Orleans

For the final seminar in the fall 2008 PRC seminar series, we welcomed Donna Cavato, Director of The Edible Schoolyard New Orleans (ESY NOLA). Prior to joining The Edible Schoolyard, she led the citywide Community and Schoolyard Gardens Project in New Orleans, developed a pilot public school gardening program, Sow & Grow, and developed the Kids' Café Teaching Garden. She shared information about ESY NOLA's mission, its components, and its impact on the social, academic, and emotional growth of students.

Based on the original Edible Schoolyard in Berkeley, California, ESY NOLA features an expansive organic garden on the campus of the Samuel J. Green Charter School. The school incorporates organic growing and seasonal cooking classes into the curriculum, creating an environment where students learn values such as teamwork, respect for the environment, and healthy eating. The Edible Garden is the cornerstone of the project, and the venue where children learn how to grow and harvest their own food. Through hands-on learning in the garden, Cavato explained, students gain a better understanding of subjects like math and science.

Green Charter School has also successfully negotiated with its food service provider and now offers its students more nutritious foods at mealtimes, such as whole wheat bread, brown rice, fresh fruit, and a salad bar. Most students (95%) qualify for federal free or reduced breakfast and lunch programs. Future plans for the School include incorporating more locally grown produce into meals, the building of a commercial kitchen for cooking classes and a remodeled cafeteria, and continuing to share expertise with area schools.

Cavato believes that the main element of success of ESY NOLA has been the participatory environment at Samuel J. Green. Students help make decisions about which recipes they want served at their cafeteria, they meet the farmers that supply their produce, and they go on field trips to supermarkets and farms. The sense of ownership over what they eat makes children more likely to try new foods and ask for them at home. The Edible Garden has changed the feel of the neighborhood, and for the first time, Cavato said, the students are proud to claim their school. ESY NOLA's work to increase access to healthy foods and change the social environment surrounding diet touches the core mission of the PRC.

For more information about the Edible Schoolyard New Orleans, visit www.esynola.org.