

School Garden Self-Assessment

This assessment was developed by researchers at Lehman College to measure key markers of success in school garden programs. It should be used as an assessment tool for your garden. It can help identify strengths and areas for improvement. Our hope is that this self-assessment process will provide a road map for creating garden learning spaces that are effective for student learning, responsive to the unique needs and resources of communities, and sustainable in the long term. You can use the information on this form to work with your school to develop achievable short-term goals and a long term sustainability plan for your garden program.

Resources and Support

Budget and Funding - The projected expenses and funds available to support a gardening program

- Low - actively seeking more funding to meet current year's needs
- Moderate - enough funds to meet yearly needs and raising for future growth
- High - surplus funds for the current and some future years

Networks & Partner Organizations - The interconnectedness of a school with other supporting organizations or individuals in the field of school gardens

- Low - few outside connections
- Moderate - some outside connections (3-4)
- High - many outside connections (or connections that meets all needs for logistics/students) (+4)

Administrative Support- Mental, practical, or other encouragement and help needed from key leaders within a school required for teachers, parents, or others to implement an ongoing gardening program

- Low - aware but uninvolved administrators (gave project approval but little or no active involvement)
- Moderate - some involvement (supportive of garden committee, interested in staying abreast of activities)
- High - valued and supported (actively promoting use of the garden to teachers, students, and parents)

Professional Development- Guided learning and training provided to educators in order to improve their knowledge, skills, and comfort using school gardens as an educational tool

- Low - encouragement by administrators, garden committee, parents, or teachers to facilitate use of the garden (e.g. host meetings, sending emails, having "open garden days")
- Moderate - some professional developments for interested teachers or parents
- High - offer professional development sessions or designated time for teachers, parents, or other to develop skills related to the physical garden or connecting it to academics

Committee Structure - The decision making committee that determines how a school's gardening program is implemented

- Low - limited participation in garden committee
- Moderate - regular meetings, some people only peripherally involved
- High - active committee of members and/or strong outside organization involvement that manages the garden, where tasks are delegated and accomplished

Physical Garden

Planning & establishing the physical space - The deliberate action(s) taken to develop and implement a strategy to maximize the garden's potential to meet the school's goals and needs for the space

- Low - inexperienced gardeners with no plan
- Moderate - some experienced gardeners with general plan/goals
- High - experienced gardeners and well-developed plan, short and long term goals

Garden care & upkeep - The physical support provided to the garden to ensure that plants, animals, or habitats in the garden have the adequate care and resources necessary for growth

- Low - a few people maintain the garden
- Moderate - passionate group maintain the garden
- High - designated group maintain the garden

Characteristics of the space - The attributes of a particular garden that facilitate or promote its use

- Low - small space, limited participation
- Moderate - large enough to accommodate
- High - open space for more than one class, includes available seating

Crop vitality & diversity - The robustness and variance of plant species in a particular garden

- Low - limited vitality or diversity
- Moderate - some diversity, fairly vital
- High - diverse and vital plants

Student Experience

Connection with curriculum - The relationship, relevance, and fit of the garden with state mandated learning objectives, aims, and goals for students in a particular grade or class

- Low - informally connected to courses (used as enrichment, optional class, or club)
- Moderate - formally connected to non-core subjects
- High - formally connected to one or more core subjects

Activities - Connection to Learning Objectives

- Low - activities with little or no connections to learning objectives
- Moderate - activities in garden vs. classroom with some connections to learning objectives
- High - hands-on gardening highly connected to academic study

Time spent in the garden - The duration and frequency of structured educational time that students spend in the garden

- Low - ~10 hours/year (1x/month spent in the garden)
- Moderate - 10-30 hours/year (1-3x/month)
- High - ~1x/week or more (more than 30 hours per year OR through growing season)

Engagement- The cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement of students in the learning process and participation in tasks related to the garden *

- Low - students do what is required
- Moderate - students express excitement during required activities
- High - students go beyond requirement (e.g. are inquisitive) and/or express interested in continued participation in the garden

Tasting - The specific activity of trying edible plants

- Low - students rarely try foods
- Moderate - students taste in the garden and lunchroom regularly (eg. Garden to Cafe)
- High - students taste at almost or every visit

Additional learning opportunities - Learning facilitated by the garden that is unrelated or in addition to mandated curriculum or learning standards

- Low - connections limited to only core academics
- Moderate - additional topics taught
- High - additional topics taught, accompanied by hands-on activities

School Community

Volunteer & parent involvement- Non-staff members of the school, neighborhood, or community become involved with the school's gardening program

- Low - support but little involvement (parents are aware of the garden, may help fundraise, or participate in single events)
- Moderate - PTA involved but on limited basis (parents are peripherally involved with garden in an ongoing process)
- High - PTA and other parents/volunteers involvement is ongoing (parents are actively involved and provide support through the garden committee and/or in other vital ways)

Social events - Time allotted for recreational activities in or related to the garden

- Low - before, afterschool, elective period participation
- Moderate - classroom-wide, non-academic events limited to students
- High - school-wide, non-academic events involving families (e.g. composting days on weekends, movie nights)

Food environment- The school's culture and standards for foods allowed within the school, offered to and/or consumed by students

- Low - healthy habits promoted in garden only or for unique times (e.g. healthy party guidelines)
- Moderate - healthy policies in classroom or lunchroom (e.g. WITS, Garden to Cafe)
- High - school wide, healthy eating policies implemented in classroom and lunchroom

Evaluation and feedback - The acquisition of information relating to the effectiveness and/or efficacy of one or more aspects of a garden or gardening program

- Low - no evaluation but open to informal feedback
- Moderate - informally collect some data (e.g. weight of harvest)
- High - conducted/planning to conduct a formal evaluation

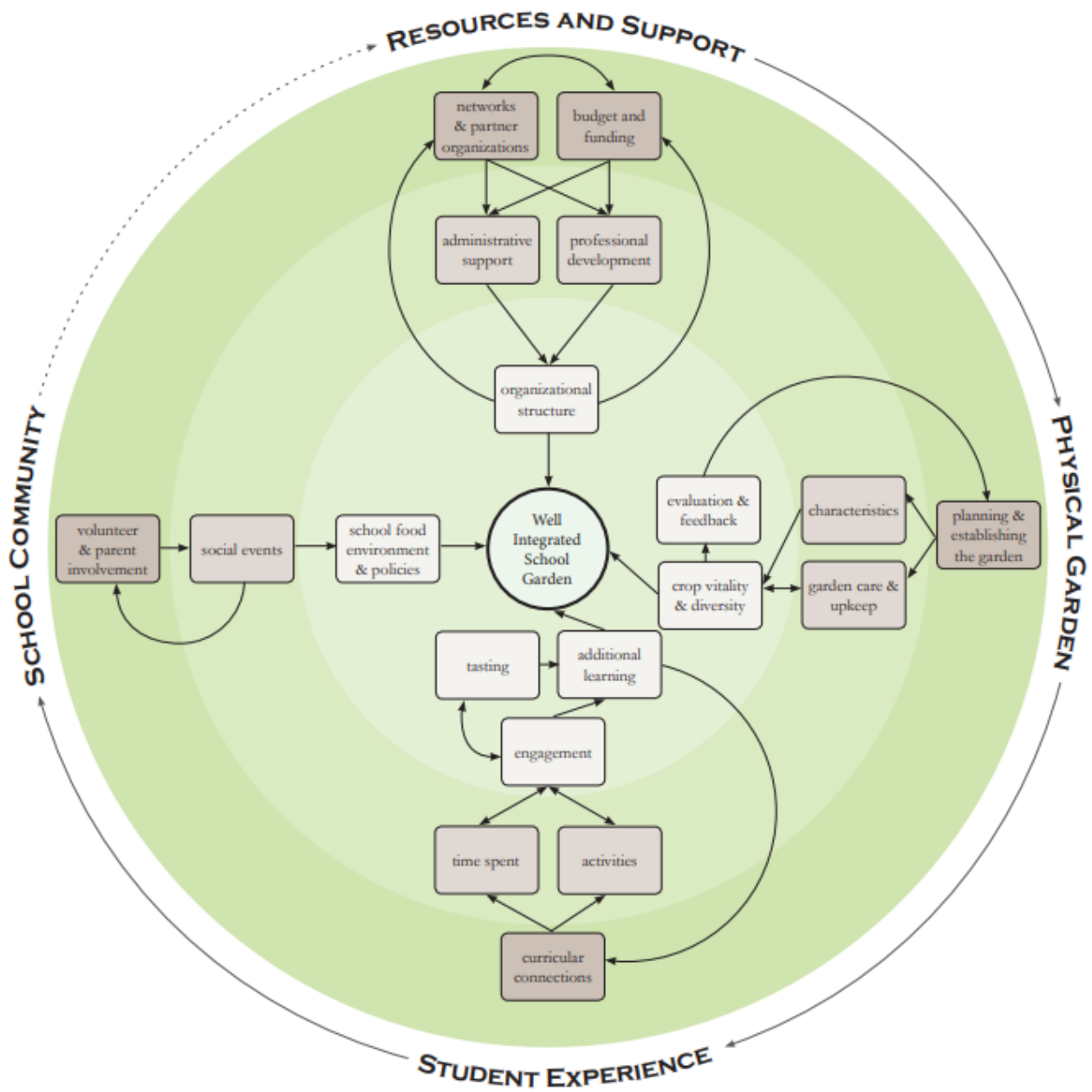
Conclusion: Acknowledge the strengths of your school garden program! Then, look at the areas for growth. Outline action steps you plan to take in the next year to grow or improve your school garden program.

Action Step:

Action Step:

Action Step:

Additional notes:



Source: Burt KG, Koch PA, Uno C, and Contento IR. The GREEN Tool (Garden Resources, Education, and Environment Nexus) For Well-Integrated School Gardens. Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at the Program in Nutrition, Teachers College, Columbia University. Research Brief, August, 2016.