

JOINT EVENT

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An evaluation of a pilot farm to school program: Student knowledge and awareness

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Statement of the Problem: The percentage of children with obesity in the United States has more than tripled since the 1970s. Today, about one in five school-aged children (ages 6–19) has obesity. School based interventions to promote healthy eating and prevent obesity are a natural fit. Farm to School is a voluntary program through which schools can purchase and highlight locally produced, farm-fresh foods. The program also promotes nutrition-based curriculum and experiential learning opportunities such as farm visits and school garden-based learning. This study evaluated a farm to school pilot program in a large urban school district to determine students’ awareness of the program at their school and if they could identify benefits of consuming locally grown produce.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: A quasi-experimental study design was used. Students in a large urban school district participated in two nutrition lessons which focused on awareness of the farm to school program and; benefits of eating locally grown foods. A pre and post-test was used to evaluate change in awareness and knowledge. The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) framework was applied which combined elements of the traditional coordinated school health approach and the whole child framework.

Findings: The sample consisted of 4th grade students (n=290) enrolled in 10 schools within a large urban school district. All 10 schools were part of a farm to school pilot program. After the intervention, a significant difference (p<0.001) was noted in program awareness. Students demonstrated an increased knowledge of locally grown produce after the nutrition intervention, specifically apples (p=0.009), pears (p=0.001), broccoli (p=0.031), and cauliflower (p=0.005). Additionally, students identified benefits of consuming locally grown produce, specifically that the food tastes great (p=0.011) and will support local farms (p=0.004).

Conclusion & Significance: This study found that the nutrition education component of the farm to school program increases knowledge of locally grown foods; benefits of consuming locally grown foods and awareness of the farm to school program within their school. Farm to school programs enhance student knowledge of consuming fruits and vegetables. Future research needs to be conducted to determine changes in eating behaviors based on participation in the farm to school program.



Figure: Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Conceptual Model

Biography

Kathleen Border is a nutrition education professional with over 20 years of experience in "Designing and implementing education programs for diverse audiences". She is an Advocate for bringing nutrition education programs to underserved communities throughout her career in dietetics. Her experience in Community Nutrition and higher education has led her to collaborate with stakeholders to support healthy eating initiatives in schools. She is an academic leader with proven success in designing and meeting national accreditation standards. She has held several leadership positions within the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. She currently serves as an Assistant Professor of Dietetics at D'Youville College, Buffalo, New York.

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