



Testimony Submitted by

**Shanon Morris, Executive Director, Edible Schoolyard NYC
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The Case for Edible Education: Building Community Health and Fighting Hunger in Schools

My name is Shanon Morris, and I am the Executive Director of Edible Schoolyard NYC. Thank you to Chairman McGovern and the House Rules Committee members for your work to end hunger in America and explore the role of public schools in this initiative.

Edible Schoolyard NYC's mission is to support edible education for every child in New York City. We partner with New York City public schools to cultivate healthy students and communities through hands-on cooking and gardening education, with the goal of transforming children's relationship with food. Today, we provide direct services and school garden support to seven public schools serving nearly 3,000 students and their families in Brooklyn, East Harlem, and the Bronx, in neighborhoods disproportionately affected by food, health, and educational system inequities. We also provide free professional development workshops to hundreds of educators across our city, expanding the reach of edible education to thousands more students.

"So many problems are tied together, and they could all be solved by having a school garden."

A fifth-grader shared this piece of wisdom at P.S. 216, Arturo Toscanini, in Brooklyn. P.S. 216 partnered with Edible Schoolyard NYC and local partners in 2010 to transform a cement parking lot into a flourishing half-acre, organic garden. This transformation was supported by former Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz and former New York City Council Member Domenic Recchia. Since 2010, we have founded another demonstration school site in East Harlem, building a courtyard and rooftop garden, greenhouse, and kitchen classroom, again with the support of the former Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer and former New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito. We have worked with many schools across the city on a smaller, more replicable scale as well, supporting each school site with school garden infrastructure.

School gardens and food education provide tremendous community, educational, health, and environmental benefits, including distribution of locally-grown, organic produce. Learning in

school green spaces enables children to observe and understand where their food comes from by making them part of a truly local food system. Garden education has also been shown to improve academic performance, especially in science and math; build social-emotional skills such as teamwork and self-regulation, and increase student preferences for choosing fruits and vegetables.

Importantly, school gardens support more equitable and culturally responsive education—they are welcoming spaces for all types of learners, including English Language Learners and hands-on learners; school gardens encourage cultural, intergenerational, and community connections; and they are restorative green spaces for families who may not have easy access to yards and parks otherwise. Students, families, educators, and community members build community through food education when the crops grown in the garden and the recipes cooked in the kitchen reflect the school community and its cultures, allowing all to identify how their own culture and cooking traditions already support health and wellness.

Edible education is a critical health and education resource that can, and should, be made available to all students and families as part of a comprehensive plan to build long-term health and end hunger in America. We urge all educators and school administrators to examine how edible education can be incorporated into their schools, and ask elected officials to bolster this work with resources for schools and non-profit organizations working towards a healthier, stronger, more just food system in our schools and beyond. Specifically, we ask the Committee to consider funding to support staff to support food and garden education, family and community engagement activities as well as nurture school garden spaces; create more school gardens and enhance current school gardens to support outdoor learning; and to train existing educators to incorporate edible education into their instruction.

Resources Needed

Food education and school gardens can be incorporated into any school no matter the space and resources at hand. We have seen lush, garden learning spaces grown indoors and outdoors, on playgrounds, basketball courts, parking lots, and hallways. Whether it's hanging planters along the school fence or installing raised beds in the schoolyard, every public school can and should have a school garden. And, we believe every student and school community deserves to benefit from the green and restorative space, socioemotional learning and academic enrichment, and connection to the land and community that school gardens can offer.

In order to launch garden programs at schools, by building a new school garden or renewing an existing one, we have found the following resources to be critical:

Garden Infrastructure Support

While every school garden is different and customized to its school community, each core learning garden should include planting beds or containers filled with good-quality growing soil; plant materials such as seeds and plant starts; a source of water; and a way to compost garden waste. There should be a sufficient number of basic gardening tools and a watertight storage shed for them. Benches and tables are very useful for transforming the space into a learning garden, if space allows.

To build a new school garden in partnership with Edible Schoolyard NYC, we recommend at least 600 square feet and eight garden beds, in order to engage an entire class in edible education at one time; it costs \$10,000-\$15,000 to build this large, robust garden. However, school gardens will likely start smaller and evolve over time. First iterations of a garden could be hanging wall planters, which cost \$1,000-\$2,000, or a few raised garden beds, which would be roughly \$3,000. Beyond costs, starting up a garden requires significant planning, preparation, and building time of approximately 3-6 months.

Beyond these start-up costs, garden maintenance costs are around \$3,000 each year, and cover expenses such as seeds and plant materials, lumber to replace old garden beds, soil and compost, and garden tools and equipment such as shovels and hoses.

In addition to these hard expenses, it is critical to have a dedicated team to care for and maintain the garden. Whether this is a paid staff member or team of dedicated volunteers, this time commitment is one of the biggest challenges to maintaining a functional, edible garden on school campuses.

Edible Education Programming

In addition to school gardens, education to teach students and families about food, cooking, and gardening is crucial to gain many of the benefits of edible education. Edible education resources from Edible Schoolyard NYC look like:

- External, non-profit educators leading direct programming at schools: this is the direct service model we use in our programs and is highly impactful for students and school communities. Expenses are between \$65,000 to \$115,000 per year, which includes salary and benefits for an educator and program manager employed by the non-profit, program supplies such as cooking utensils and pantry items to cook with, and other indirect and operations expenses.
- Professional development support for existing school educators: this is another model we use to expand the reach of edible education beyond our direct service schools. Expenses are roughly \$85,000 per year for our organization, which reached 251 educators in 2020-21. These educators in turn reached 14,268 students. In addition to these workshops we host individually, we have also contracted with the NYC Department of Education, leading full-day workshops for educators for roughly \$2,000 per day.

Other Required Resources

Beyond the hard costs of supplies, equipment, and infrastructure, we believe that one of the most critical needs to build and maintain a school garden is dedicated gardener and educator time. Additional resources required to run school garden programming include:

- Collaborative leadership and responsibility for the garden project from a garden committee that includes school custodial staff, school administrators, parents, and students. This ensures that garden planning and labor is shared and that the garden continues to thrive when individual gardeners leave.
- Buy-in from the school leadership to endorse garden and food programming as a priority

- Dedicated volunteers to support with garden maintenance and relieve workload on the garden committee
- Stipend for school educators who take on extra roles to oversee programs or work in the garden
- Technical support from local and national gardening organizations, such as Farm to School institutes and urban agriculture experts
- Sustainable funding for garden maintenance. One challenge we recognize is that gardens require funding year over year to maintain the space and plant and harvest a new season of crops. A combination of public and private funding is needed to maintain gardens each year, and multi-year, sustainable funding is best.

Thank you for your consideration of edible education programs in all schools. Please reach out to info@esynyc.org with any questions or feedback. We look forward to continuing this conversation and working towards edible education for all.