

The Edible Schoolyard New Orleans

Renewing New Orleans One Okra Plant and One Child at a Time

Mission: The mission of The Edible Schoolyard New Orleans (ESY NOLA) is to create and sustain an expansive organic garden on the New Orleans public school campus of Samuel J. Green Charter School. The Edible Schoolyard is integrating organic gardening and fresh seasonal cooking into the school's curriculum, culture and food programs. Through the Edible Schoolyard experience, students learn responsibility and respect for the natural world, and that hard work and collective efforts through teamwork yield real benefits in the garden, kitchen, school, and in life.



Project Description: ESY NOLA aspires to become a model project to transform and energize effective public education. Started in the Fall of 2006, The Edible Schoolyard provides students with engaging hands-on learning experiences through weekly garden and kitchen classes, and school-based seasonal events that promote the local food traditions of New Orleans. Students in grades K-8 participate in gardening and cooking lessons that reinforce classroom coursework in core subjects (science, social studies, language and math). At The Edible Schoolyard, the garden and kitchen become interactive venues where textbook lessons literally come to life.

The Edible Garden—An expansive organic teaching garden located on the public school campus of Green Charter school is the venue for weekly garden classes where children learn how to grow and harvest their own food. Garden-based lessons are interdisciplinary by design. The garden includes a composting and worm composting (vermiculture) station, an outdoor classroom, an outdoor kitchen area, arbors and walkways, and a butterfly garden.



The Edible Kitchen—Future plans include the building of a full-scale teaching kitchen that will be the primary venue for cooking classes to teach students how to prepare and enjoy meals using ingredients from our own garden and from local farmers' markets. Currently, cooking classes are held in a classroom setting, and in the outdoor kitchen area located in The Edible Garden. Students as young as kindergarten participate in *Food ABC* classes in which they prepare and sample a variety of fresh foods; and all grade levels have cooking integrated into their Edible Schoolyard experience, whether through a science-based cooking lesson or through an elective cooking club for older students.



The scope of work for The Edible Schoolyard also includes the transformation of the cafeteria and food programs for the school. Through special events and strategic partnerships ESY NOLA is able to introduce fresh, local foods to students, families and school faculty. By creating a demand from the ground up, it is our intention that school-based food and snack programs will reflect the values of “wholesome, nutritious and delicious”—fueling our children in mind, body and spirit toward their success in school and in the larger community.

Background: ESY NOLA is based on the original Edible Schoolyard located in Berkeley, CA and is the first sanctioned replication of the successful program founded by Alice Waters and the Chez Panisse Foundation. Founded 11 years ago, the Edible Schoolyard at Martin Luther King Middle School in Berkeley, CA has been cited as a national model for educators and hosts thousands of visitors each year. According to a study by Harvard Medical School cited in The New York Times Magazine “After one year, students at King, compared with a control group at a similar middle school, showed improvement in behavior and had fewer emotional problems. They were savvier about ecology, and their overall grade point averages improved.”

History: ESY NOLA is the culmination of a significant amount of planning, partnering, and sharing of ideas and dreams. The inception of the Edible Schoolyard in New Orleans was made possible by the leadership and commitment of Randy Fertel, Alice Waters, and Tony Recasner. Committed to making a difference in the lives of public school children in post-Katrina New Orleans, these key individuals rallied widespread support and recruited a cadre of talented and committed individuals to form the ESY NOLA Task Force, Advisory and Culinary Boards. Strategic partnerships for the project include the *Ruth U. Fertel Foundation*, *Octavia Foundation*, *The Chez Panisse Foundation*, *marketumbrella.org*, *Slow Food New Orleans*, the *New Orleans Town Gardeners*, and the *Culinary Corps*.

The Schools: Samuel J. Green Charter & New Orleans Charter Middle

“No Work, No Benefits”

The mission of Green Charter and New Orleans Charter Middle is to produce high student achievement in an environment that promotes the healthy social, emotional and physical growth of young children and adolescents. The schools provide children with opportunities and experiences that stretch their limited view of themselves in the world. To achieve this end, we expose students to a variety of people, places, experiences and ideas as a means of cultivating their awareness and enriching their lives. The Edible Schoolyard embodies this philosophy by creating enriching, hands-on experiences in the Edible Garden and Kitchen.

Student Population: ESY NOLA serves 326 students from Green Charter in grades K-8th, and 49 students from New Orleans Charter Middle in grades 4-6th. The student population for the 2007-2008 school year is 98% African-American, 75% from single family homes; the vast majority (98%) qualify for federal free or reduced lunch/breakfast programs. Green Charter and New Orleans Charter Middle Schools are open access (no testing requirements) public charter schools that serve children and families from neighborhoods throughout the City of New Orleans.

School Leadership/Governance: The schools are led by Dr. Anthony Recasner, a psychologist who has earned accolades for his innovative and effective approach to educating young children and adolescents. The schools are governed by the non-profit board of Middle School Advocates, Inc. This leadership opened the first charter school in New Orleans, and was the highest performing non-magnet public middle school in the city since its opening in 1998 until 2005, when Hurricane Katrina destroyed the school building. New Orleans Charter Middle School has since reopened as of September 2007 in its new location, just a short distance from Green Charter School.

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