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Proposal for Oberlin Public Schools
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Evidence

Funding educational initiatives for youth programs will transform and improve the quality of life and health of the nation's populace. Targeting the country's youth is the ideal entry point for planting healthy food education because children will progressively learn lessons and values about how to eat properly and grow their own food that will continue to flourish over time. Implementing a multi-faceted food education program in schools across the nation is opportune because it will lay a foundation for students to learn how to think about health from a more dynamic perspective, encompassing issues surrounding the environment, nutrition, community building, economy, and leadership. This initiative to enact a synergized program involving growing and eating more healthy, whole -foods within public schools will introduce immediate and enduring results. According to California Project LEAN, a joint program of the California Department of Health Services and the Public Health Institute, "improved nutritional status has a positive and direct impact on academic achievement. When children's basic nutritional and fitness needs are met, they have the cognitive energy to learn and achieve." Studies clearly prove that healthy foods allow students to retain and learn more efficiently. By eating healthier at a younger age, children will reduce the long-term health risks and poor eating habits that can spawn at an early age and surface at an older age. The National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity supports this type of program and promotes "healthy and physical activity to help reduce the illnesses, disabilities, premature deaths, and costs caused by diet- and inactivity-related diseases such as heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity."

Overweight children have increased incidence of physical conditions, including hypertension, coronary artery disease, sleep apnea, orthopedic problems and type-2 diabetes. Integrating a healthier food program in Oberlin with sustainable growing concepts fosters an initiative that provides students with the knowledge to eat healthier and to learn how foods are grown, who grows them, how food is prepared, and the connection and influence that food has on society. Having this program will reduce the rate of overweight adolescence in Oberlin; cutting down on the adverse effects and health risks that obesity begins to accrue during adulthood. According to the Ohio Public Health Association, "If a child is overweight by the age of 10-13 years, there is a 70% chance he or she will be overweight as an adult." Incorporating a comprehensive healthier eating and sustainable growing curriculum will address and help prevent childhood obesity through better food and more physical exercise by gardening and outdoor activities. The Ohio Public Health Association said that child obesity has tripled since the 1960s. By supplying schools with local foods and having school gardens, Oberlin students will gain a direct awareness and connectivity with the foods they are eating, while knowing that their food is coming from a local food source. Launching this program is advantageous for Oberlin children and local food growers because children will develop healthy eating habits, while stimulating the local economy. This type of program promotes students' understanding of food systems to establish durable values and skills to adopt for the future.

Solution Framework

In the Oberlin Public Schools, national and local initiatives to implement more well rounded, food-centered wellness education programs are beginning to converge. In order to focus on schools in the context of increasing nourishment in the general local food system, we decided to focus on the unique characteristics of Oberlin as a community, including projects and infrastructure already in place, history of agriculture and food access, in addition to cultural and economic implications of food consumption and education.

Currently, food-based wellness efforts in Oberlin Schools are barely connected projects between the district, a concerned circle of parents, outside non-profits and organizations, and students from the college. In order to establish a lasting, cohesive program, our first point of action was to bring all the interest groups together. Efforts have been made to consolidate a network of projects including those like the District Wellness Committee led by the school district with impetus from the national and state government, college groups like OGROW, programs out of the New Agrarian Center and George Jones Farm, as well as initiatives led by former students.

While these groups are still in the process of getting connected, we aim to create a climate where all parties can influence the Oberlin schools wellness program. Possible responsibilities include utilizing the agency of the district administration for program enforcement and project funding alongside fluid communication and cooperation with other groups, Oberlin college students as a network of willing participants and allies to parents and others, parents and students as the strongest voice for wants/needs and program enthusiasm, and organizations like the NAC, 4H, and City Fresh providing structural examples and assistance.

In order for Oberlin to keep growing in the food movement, it would be helpful for the aforementioned parties to form a coalition. This coalition would bring together anyone interested in expanding the community food system in the schools and mobilization efforts would be started through flyers for parents, advertisements in church newsletters, and endorsement from Jeff Andrews, the superintendent. While having a interest meeting will be a great start, in order to keep cohesion in the food movement in Oberlin schools, a section of the district website should be devoted to such efforts.

Case Studies

We have focused on three successful programs in the Midwest that have created curricula within public schools about nutrition and healthy food preparation. The main objective of all of these programs is to provide students with snacks and lunches that come from as much local, organic, and non-processed foods as possible. Some schools have created on-site gardens that can generate fundraising for programs and provide hands-on garden education, but it is more common for these schools (mostly located in cities) to take farm tours for this sort of learning.

Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch is an organization that has implemented farm-to-school programs in about 30 schools in the Madison and Milwaukee areas. The schools have coordinated with local kitchen co-ops to prepare and deliver fresh and healthy daily classroom snacks grown by local farmers. Their website suggests starting a pilot program in a school with a harvest of the month, which highlights a seasonal item each month to purchase, learn about, and feature in recipes. The program has also connected with local chefs, who make visits to the

classroom once a month for hands-on culinary education for middle school students. Wisconsin Homegrown lunch has made strides in creating a food policy that increases healthy and local foods available in the cafeteria. They have a purchasing preference for local and organic foods with minimal processing involved. The policy also encourages whole grains and fresh produce, limits dessert offerings, and bans high-sugar foodstuffs like soda, candy, and donuts.

Fresh from the Farm has provided several schools in the Chicago area with their eight-week curriculum that educates 3rd and 4th graders about food, nutrition, and health. Through garden activities, and farm tours, the students can make connections with how and where their food was produced. There are several “meet the farmer” days, where the farmers come to the school to share their biographies and tips for proper soil care. Local chefs also visit the schools for cooking demonstrations. One component of this program that is especially strong is its accessibility to parents. Parents who may not know about nutrition and farm practices are invited to participate in classes and farm tours, and so they can take what they learn back to their families and the community. The schools also offer fresh produce baskets at a discounted price to parents. The Fresh from the Farm school programs were met with a lot of hesitation at first from parents and school administrative staff, and it took two years of advocacy until the program could begin a trial. Many of the schools initially faced limitations of kitchen space to cook meals on-site, so off-site locations were sometimes needed for homemade lunch meals.

Veggie U (Huron, Ohio) is a non-profit organization that stems from The Chef’s Garden. The program began in 15 Ohio fourth grade classrooms with the goal fighting childhood obesity and has now spread to thousands of classrooms. A school can purchase a Veggie U kit for \$400, which contains all of the materials needed for their nutrition and cooking curriculum. Part of the program includes periodic farm field trips where the farmers teach about soil care, seeding, and harvesting. Top chefs in the area also come visit the schools to teach about preparing healthier meals.

Interviews and Community Support

Local Foods in Local Schools officially started in Fall 2008 as a campaign for OPIRG's Grassroots Organizing Exco. It was a joint effort by College students Laura Geller and Sarah Bolinger to take on the garden at the high school. The garden had previously been used for a project known as EAT (Eating in Action and Thought), run by Lina Yamashita (Oberlin Grad '08, now studying education at Harvard). EAT was a combination of teaching students at the high school how to grow food and teaching students at Eastwood Elementary about eating healthfully and locally. Sarah and Laura worked to revive Lina's efforts and did pretty well but met a few roadblocks. They had 20+ students showing interest, but very few ever showed up to work in the garden, and at most they had about 5 students at the high school. The group has been on hiatus since the snow started falling in December, and this semester they've been joined by Oberlin College Environment and Society classes as a semester project. Their liaison at the high school is Helen Dupont (hdupont@oberlinschools.org), who is most responsible for the garden, but she has also indicated that Craig Brandt, their environmental science teacher, would like to be on-board as well. Local Foods in Local Schools' long term goals would probably be to have a network of gardening projects linked throughout the school district, focusing on growing one's own food, composting waste, minimizing food miles, and eating healthfully. For this semester,

their goals are to successfully grow a garden of vegetables and utilize this to teach a group of high school students about its importance. These goals are flexible, but they still need a strong group of passionate students willing to put in hours.

OGROW (Oberlin Gardening Resource Outreach Workers) is an umbrella organization that helps develop and maintain garden projects at local schools initiated by Oberlin College students. This work provides alternative learning environments within schools and the community where college students educate other students on topics including gardening, local ecology, and nutrition. Gardens are currently located at Eastwood Elementary School, Prospect Elementary School, and Oberlin High School. Although each garden initiative plays a unique role in the community, they share a common dedication to the goals of education and building local food systems. There are about 30 students on the OGROW mailing list, but only 5-10 are in regular contact with Amelia Jensen, the unofficial organizer (amelia.jensen@oberlin.edu). Most of the members are affiliated with at least one group working in a garden and/or outdoor education project in the Oberlin schools. The group was officially chartered in the 2007-08 school year by members of the Eastwood Outdoor Classroom, students working at the Boys and Girls Club, and some others who wanted to have a collective Oberlin College Student Finance Committee budget to fund their individual projects. OGROW's short-term goals are to organize workshops and speakers about gardening and outdoor education, have people available to help out on different groups' garden work days, and share OGROW's budget for getting seeds and other tools and materials. Their long-term goal is to provide resources for all of the smaller groups and archive projects for future members.

Leeza Ramsey is the owner and manager of the Oberlin Market and a parent of Oberlin Public school students. Leeza has been trying to work with the district for years surrounding issues of nutrition education and she is currently sitting on the nutrition committee of the district wellness coalition. According to Leeza, this coalition which is “the no child left behind of health” has three aspects; nutrition, activity (physical education), and facilities (water/air filtration, plumbing, lighting). Objectives of the nutrition committee include getting more health conscious and local/locally sourced food and creating/enforcing quality standards. There have been efforts to have an Oberlin student do their winter term project assisting Karen Wells (director of cafeterias) with purchasing efforts, but these plans fell through.

Evelyn Bryant is the education coordinator at the George Jones Memorial Farm. Evelyn has a comprehensive food/environmental education curriculum set up for public school students kindergarten through 12th grades. This curriculum involves having students come out to the farm as much as possible at a fee of two dollars per student with free bussing provided by Lorain County Solid Waste district. Right now Evelyn is focusing on the summer Discovery Camp for student ages 8-10. Because the camp costs \$140 a week, Evelyn is searching for scholarship funding for students, any support in this area would be much appreciated. As someone very closely linked with the Oberlin schools, Evelyn suggests starting from the top of the administration and working down from there. Seeing that teachers are entirely overwhelmed with Oberlin's adaptation of the International Baccalaureate program, there are slim chances of starting projects with individuals this semester. Evelyn is also planning a series of edible schoolyard workshops for the fall.