**ABSTRACT**

School gardens are growing; just in California alone there are around 4,000 (Skinner and Chi, 2012). The Clairemont Mesa Foundation is supporting the community by creating and designing gardens at elementary schools. The purpose of gardens is to provide outdoor instructional space to spark student interest in academic activities. This poster focuses on the successes and challenges of the four school gardens in Clairemont Mesa during the second school year of the project 2016-2017.

Some of the challenges are commitment and responsibility to maintain the gardens. Water and soil resources are important as well. While some schools have better access to water and soil, some others would have to work harder to pull the resources out. Faculty and parents’ involvement in the gardens are determinants for gardens to succeed. Some schools reached their goal for garden installation faster than others. Once the gardens are established, elementary teachers would get trained to learn how to take children outdoors and teach science lessons. Teachers would help bring books alive with real plants, animals and the practical and useful tools that nature can give us.

The outcomes from exposing children at an early age to learning in an outdoor environment are very positive and promising. There are some studies which show that children exposed to nature-based learning develop a strong sense of belonging, self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, and engagement. These traits can lead to better grades and achievement. Children also get more awareness about nature, environmental changes, recycling, composting, and food systems, just to mention a few of the many positive outcomes. This suggests that school gardens are a valuable part of education. School gardens have real-world application that motivates students to want to come to school and learn.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Mesa Association is leading a great project in creating and maintaining school gardens in the Clairemont community. The learning process starts from the beginning about how to create, plan, and design a garden to how to maintain them and keep them safe from plague. The purpose of creating more gardens at schools is to use them as part of outdoor experiences and science labs for learning. This all include more nature-based learning as part of the STEM curriculum. It is a long term process learning and rewarding experience.

During this learning process, I have found that parent’s and faculty involvement in garden activities it is going to determinate how fast the gardens will get ready and continuously kept maintained. According to Grolnick, when individuals participating in activities with a sense of autonomy, they are more likely to be active and persevere. Thus, parents along with faculty involvement will be the key for a successful start and along the way.

**OBJECTIVES**

- Use the outdoors as a vehicle for student learning in STEAM
- Motivate students to come to class and learn
- Promote healthy eating habits

**BENEFITS**

- Improved learning outcomes
- Sense of autonomy and relatedness
- Collaboration leads to friendships and less prejudiced attitudes
- Cross-curricular connections
- Awareness of environmental changes
- Better attitudes toward nature
- Recycling and composting skills
- Learn about microorganisms essential for life

We need gardens because we need to get better food resources.

Gardens bring together people!!!

**REFERENCES**

