



## COMMON THREADS FOOD EDUCATION

### What does the research say about the effectiveness of garden and cooking based education?

Abundant research shows that when children are engaged in growing and preparing healthy foods, they are more likely to eat them. Further, when kids get in the habit of making good food choices early on, there is a dramatic decrease in their risk of suffering from food-related health issues such as hunger, diabetes, and obesity.

Empowering young people to make healthy food choices is one of the simplest ways that we can help all youth – particularly those living in high-risk circumstances – to be more successful in their lives physically, emotionally, and academically.

The CDC has published [a review of evidence on the impact of cooking classes on food-related preferences, attitudes and behaviors of school-aged children](#). The National Gardening Association also maintains an [updated summary](#) of the research on the positive impact of gardening in a variety of arenas. These include science achievement scores, social skills, environmental stewardship behaviors, and long-term eating behaviors.

## How does gardening and cooking with kids in schools support other strategic community priorities in Bellingham and Whatcom County?

Common Threads' efforts to help children fall in love with healthy food are well aligned with the Whatcom County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) strategic priorities to:

- Support healthy child, youth, and family development
- Promote healthy and active living in neighborhoods and communities

Common Threads programs are also well aligned with a key nutrition priority and strategy identified in the **Whatcom County Community Action Plan for Healthy and Active Living:**

- Priority 1 - Nutrition: Increase consumption of healthy food among children and families. Identified Strategies:
  - Support development of school and community gardens where food access and green space disparities exist
  - Ensure strong school, childcare, and other institutional policies that support healthy eating and lifelong healthy nutrition habits

Additionally, Common Threads programs support the [Bellingham Promise](#) and the [Bellingham Farm to School Promise](#) and align with the following Bellingham School District's identified key strategies:

- **Innovation and Flexibility** - Hands-on, integrated, experiential projects such as gardening and cooking are especially well suited to many students who struggle in the classroom.
- **Early Childhood Education** - Learning healthy eating and environmental stewardship practices early on sets students up for a lifetime of success in these arenas.
- **Student, Family, and Community Engagement** - In Common Threads' spring 2014 teacher survey, **92.3%** of the 90 teachers responding stated that their garden helps build a sense of community within the school. **82.2%** indicated that their students express a greater interest in trying new fruits and

vegetables since becoming involved in the garden. Gardening and cooking are exemplary ways to involve the whole community in promoting the health and wellness of students.

- **Whole Child Development** – Healthy children are better learners. Children who aren't hungry learn better, act better, and feel better. Offering opportunities for students to learn to be good stewards of the health of their bodies, their communities and their environment is critical to growing a thoughtful citizenry. Working together to grow and prepare food and care for the environment supports the development of many life skills such as teamwork, patience, and careful observation.