MEDIA RELEASE

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SCHOOL KIDS DEMAND MORE HOMEWORK

Findings of a new Australian Government-funded independent evaluation have the potential to change the way educators view the benefits of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden National Program in Australian primary schools.

Around four out of five parents report their child asking for more “homework” after participating in the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden National Program. And kids want parents to make the same food at home that they cook at school.

These are just some of the findings of the independent evaluation conducted by the Centre for Health Service Development, Australian Health Services Research Institute, at the University of Wollongong.

The evaluation of 28 Kitchen Garden National Program schools and 14 comparison schools from across Australia found real health behaviour change for children, families and school communities participating in the Program.

Importantly, more children are taking up cooking at home and starting backyard veggie gardens after participating in Australia’s revolutionary Kitchen Garden National Program.

Founder of the Kitchen Garden Program, Stephanie Alexander, has welcomed the positive findings. “We are very excited about the evidence of significant improvements in students’ food choices and kitchen lifestyle behaviours. Children in the Kitchen Garden National Program liked cooking more and parents liked cooking with their children more as a direct result of participating in the Program,” she said.

The evaluation also found that 97% of teachers responded positively to how the Program supported classroom learning. They reported that students found the hands-on activities engaging and it aided learning across other subject areas, commenting that the Program “forms an intrinsic part of our students’ learning”.

Other important findings from the evaluation show:

- Students in Kitchen Garden National Program schools were more likely to report that they would always try new foods as compared to students in comparison schools. The proportion was higher if the students had grown or cooked the foods themselves.

- Participating students, staff and school communities all reported that the Kitchen Garden National Program had made positive impacts on the school and students.

- Teachers and parents reported improvements in students’ social behaviours, with 86% of teachers reporting improvements in students’ teamwork skills and 50% of parents reporting improvements across a range of student behaviours, including modifying previous bullying behaviour, managing difficult behaviour, interacting with people of many ages, leadership skill development and sense of pride in the school.
Staff reported that the Program provided support for students at risk of social exclusion, including students from different socio-cultural groups. The wide range of practical activities embodied in this Program enabled students with different abilities to participate in an equal manner.

“We are very pleased to observe improved involvement and engagement, including attendance, with this group of students. It is extremely rewarding to see these students enjoying previously unknown fresh healthy foods and as a result, improving their self-esteem and confidence, as well as embarking on opportunities to learn differently and excel in different areas,” said Ms Alexander.

Associate Professor Heather Yeatman from the University of Wollongong’s evaluation team, said the findings provided important insights into promoting the health of children. “This study confirms that changing children’s food preferences is possible if the whole school shares the vision of engaging children in enjoyable, skill-based experiences. Flexibility within the Program model allowed the schools to adapt the Program to their circumstances and to link it with other areas of the curriculum. This evaluation provides some very important lessons in promoting health of children,” said Professor Yeatman.


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About the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program:

The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation is the leader in pleasurable food education for primary school children in Australia. Its flagship, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program, provides pleasurable food education to children within the school environment. The Program develops lifelong skills in the kitchen and garden and encourages children between 8 and 12 years old to enjoy all the benefits of growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing fresh, delicious food. In 2013, 296 schools around Australia are Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Schools, with almost 37,000 children actively engaged in the Program each year. To learn more about the Kitchen Garden Program visit: www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au