In this chapter, we present perspectives and insights from three practitioners—a teacher, a principal, and a superintendent—who have intimate knowledge of and experience with gardens at their schools and/or districts. Our rationale for selecting educators at three "levels" of the school system is to show that at each level of the organization, there are educators who have a depth of understanding and knowledge of learning gardens as educational tools. Whether it is the classroom, the school, or the district, these individuals represent the voices of educators across the country where school gardens are designed, developed, and integrated with the curriculum. We have picked two school districts: Portland Public Schools with which author Williams has a 20-year history and where both authors have starred and/or supported learning gardens in schools; and San Francisco Unified School District, which has a large percentage of schools with robust school gardens that have served as research sites for Williams since 2005. Both school districts are similar in size and have a large number of schools with learning gardens. They are both considered Title I school districts with over 40% of students on free and reduced school lunch and of non-white status.

We begin with Access Elementary School, a K–8 school on the Sabin campus in Portland Public School District, in north Portland in Oregon. In 2008, Sabin school’s vacant lot was transformed into a garden. By using this story, we demonstrate how learning gardens can be started and integrated with school curriculum. We requested third grade teacher Dezié Clarke to share her experiences since she had involved her students in building the gardens. More notably, as a teacher, she designed a garden-based curriculum and activities for ongoing engagement of her students. We requested that she use her teacher’s lens and perspective to explain the evolution of the garden and ways she and her students were engaged in the learning that occurred.
Next, we highlight a K–5 school, Lewis Elementary, in Portland, Oregon. Unlike Access Academy, this school is unique in that it has a 40-year history with outdoor learning that has seen waves of environmental interest. Yet, in the last decade, the school’s garden program has been strengthened and serves as a site where visitors, both national and international, are inspired to see the vigorous parental and community-based support for the principal’s vision of integrating their learning gardens into the broader ethic of sustainability that the school has embraced. Tim Lauer, the principal, shares his perspective as a school leader with a focus on partnerships which he views as critical to such ventures and school learning.

Finally, we present Superintendent Carlos Garcia’s perspective on school gardens in San Francisco Unified School District and ways in which his district has created an infrastructure that continues to foster the building and integration of gardens in the San Francisco schools. Bonds passed in 2003 and 2006 included green schoolyards construction and the decade-old strong grass-roots support for gardens has been sustained.

We believe that the voices and insights of these practitioners will demonstrate in authentic ways how practice comes alive and will help move forward not only the creation of learning gardens on school grounds but also ways they are to be integrated to ensure that academic learning is promoted. Soil’s living features can thrive in our schools when we value life-affirming language and practice at all levels—the classroom, the school, and the district.

**Access (K–8) Academy at Sabin, Portland, Oregon**

Sabin Community Native Garden and Sabin Edible Garden are the result of students, teachers, parents, and volunteers coming together from the Sabin neighborhood school community in Portland to bring vitality to the neighborhood and the school. Between 1990 and 2000, the enrollment at Sabin Elementary School (K–5) was declining. To avoid closure of the building, Access Academy (K–8) was started and housed in the building to serve gifted students in the Portland metropolitan area who performed at the 99th percentile level in nationally normed tests for aptitude and/or achievement in any or all of the following areas: language, math, or general intellect. The mission of Access is to develop a learning environment so that gifted children thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

In May 2007, dozens of Sabin parents, teachers, staff, and neighbors laid the groundwork to begin plans to convert a vacant lot at the school which had a bland expanse of unevenly growing grass into a garden. The north end of the school was selected since there was open space and sunlight and the area could be potentially fenced. The foundation was laid for the start of the Sabin Edible Garden with a view to making the space available for educating students at Sabin, Access Academy, and the Schools Uniting Neighborhood (SUN) schools program. SUN schools, a program for low-income students, operates both during
the academic year and also the summer; Valerie Thompson was hired as an AmeriCorp SUN staff and she joined Madelyn Mickelberry-Morris, hired by the Sabin Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA comprised committed parents who wanted to revive the neighborhood through the garden program and provided financial support and human capital for the Sabin gardens. Over time, Isabel LaCourse was hired as coordinator. Besides vegetable, wildlife, and native garden beds, attractive benches and pavers for stone paths were constructed and placed in garden areas where there is ongoing development of beds and art and educational activities.

The schoolyard was transformed from a barren lot into an edible garden that was designed in the shape of a star with separate raised garden beds and barrels. Fresh vegetable starts went in, as well as fruit trees and berry bushes. Students, parents, and other volunteers spread donated cedar chips around the pathways to suppress weeds, maintain moisture for raised beds, and give the garden a beautiful and well-maintained appearance. As the garden began to become more established, the PTA identified the need for a Sabin Garden Committee to be responsible for allocation of resources, funding for projects and materials, garden maintenance, curriculum development for classroom use of the garden, long-term goals and vision, and the distribution of food grown in edible gardens.

As interest in the Sabin gardens grew, more parents with gardening, carpentry and construction skills volunteered. A beautifully designed iron gate was installed. Two cob benches were built with sand and straw with student involvement. Garden art made by students added color and beauty. The clay art was put in by Access Run for the Arts funds in 2009 with guest artist Sara Ferguson. In addition, on the south and west side of the school grounds, the new Sabin Community Native Garden received approximately 300 native plants and had pathways redefined with fresh bark chips.

The neighborhood takes pride in a learning environment that connects children to nature. Students harvest food that grows in the gardens and they are often outdoors learning about wildlife and nature. When the garden is hibernating, students plant cover crops to protect and enrich the soil and harvest hardy winter edible crops on a regular basis.

We invited Dezié Clarke, a third grade teacher from Access Academy, to share how she designed the curriculum and integrated the Sabin gardens in her teaching. The next section captures her philosophy of teaching and elucidates ways she spent a year involving third graders in learning in and from the school garden.

**Ethnobotany: A Year of Schoolyard Learning—Dezié Clarke, Third-Grade Teacher**

I would like to address who I am as a teacher and how I plan for my classes before I can talk about the garden program, since that will help with providing the broad