# AOW:Week of Sept 19 Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# **School garden helps improve student health – and grades**

LOS ANGELES, Calif. — Before she joined the after-school gardening program at her inner-city Los Angeles high school, Elizabeth Castro had never even tasted beets or kumquats.

Now, the 15-year-old doesn't just eat these things. She also grows them on her school campus, in a garden bigger than a football field, smack in middle of a **gritty** city neighborhood.

"Instead of going home and doing nothing at all, we come here," Castro said. Besides learning about new foods herself, she has also taken samples home for her family to try.

**U.S. Surgeon General Pays A Visit**

"Many things that I experienced here, I had never experienced before," Castro told Surgeon General Vivek Murthy when he toured the 1.5 acre site. The surgeon general is the top doctor in the United States and is **appointed** by the government to **oversee** matters of public health in the country.

Murthy visited the garden, which is a partnership between community organizations and John C. Fremont High School. He wanted to give support to this **unique** program that helps deal with weight issues in children and the lack of availability of fresh produce where they live.

"These kinds of programs, they help build a demand for healthy foods," Murthy said.

**Students Learn To Grow, Prepare Food**

At the South Los Angeles campus, students involved in the 12-week after-school gardening **apprenticeship** program learn to grow food. They also learn to cook healthy dishes, using the kumquats and limes, potatoes, peas and beets that they grow themselves.

The Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust is a group that works to create parks and gardens in Los Angeles. It partnered with the school to start the garden four years ago and plans to soon add a **greenhouse**. Mark Glassock, who is director of special projects for the Trust, said the students have seen improvement not just in terms of nutrition, but also in their grades. He would like to see more schools adopt similar programs.

"Schools have a lot of property on their campuses, much of which is **underutilized**, so this is a great **alternative** to use that space," he said.

**Fruits, Vegetables Can Reduce Obesity**

A 2013 report showed about 40 percent of Fremont High School's students were overweight or obese, Glassock said.  That is higher than the national average. **Obesity** is the condition of being severely overweight and can lead to serious health problems, including heart disease. Across the country, about 17 percent of children ages 2 to 19 are obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a government agency in charge of protecting the health and safety of Americans. Studies show that eating more fresh fruits and vegetables is an important way of fighting weight problems.

Azucena Lozoya, 16, said she signed up for the gardening program because she never had a chance to try anything like it before. Since then, she has enjoyed tasting **kale** and a variety of melons. Such foods are new additions to the rice, bean and chicken dishes she usually gets at home, she said.

"My mom never makes stuff like that," Lozoya said. "This helps us have a different range of food. This helps us have choices."

QUESTIONS (ANSWER ON NOTEBOOK PAPER OR RECEIVE A ZERO!)

1. What would convince you to join an after-school garden club? Do you think it is something that could happen at ECMS?
2. In your own words, what is the Surgeon General?
3. Why do you believe students’ grades increased when they participated in the garden club?
4. Write a short paragraph convincing Ms. Davis to allow you to create a garden club at ECMS. Use lots of support and details from this article!