



Food Matters in the Classroom

Currently, the most common health condition in children is being overweight¹. Schools are an important place to establish healthy eating habits because more than 95% of kids are enrolled in school and eat a large portion of their daily food intake there². Sometimes teachers reward students with snacks, usually candies and other “junk” food. But for the student, associating food as a reward for good behavior and performance can lead to linking food with emotions, which encourages irregular eating and weight gain throughout their lives. Rewarding students with food not only establishes lifetime habits of reaching for unhealthy comfort foods, but it also encourages them to ignore their natural appetite signals and the healthy eating messages taught in school³.

Evidence shows there is a strong connection between nutrition and academic performance. Children who lack adequate nutrition are more likely to feel less energized, have trouble concentrating, and score lower on standardized tests^{4,5,6}. These behaviors result in impaired learning for the child⁴. Students who do not eat enough at home tend to repeat a grade in school more than their peers. They are also more likely to be absent or late for class⁷.

For Further Reading

School Wellness Resource Kit:

www.candoonline.org/sites/default/files/SchoolWellnessResourceKit.pdf

Action for Healthy Kids: www.actionforhealthykids.org

Kidnetic.org: www.ific.org/kidnetic/index.cfm

Team Nutrition: www.teamnutrition.usda.gov/Default.htm

References

1. Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Curtin LR, McDowell MA, Tabak CJ, Flegal KM. Prevalence of overweight and obesity in the United States, 1999-2004. *JAMA*. 2006;295:1549-1555.
2. Action for Healthy Kids: School Wellness Policies Fact Sheet. Accessed 7/11/2015 www.actionforhealthykids.org.
3. Coalition for Activity and Nutrition to Defeat Obesity: School Wellness Resource Kit. Accessed 7/11/2015 www.candoonline.org.
4. Bogden JF. Fit, healthy and ready to learn: A school healthy policy guide. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Boards of Education, 2000.
5. Halterman JS, Kaczorowski JM, Aligne CA, et al. Iron deficiency and cognitive achievement among school-aged children and adolescents in the United States. *Pediatrics* 2001;107(6): 1381-1386.
6. American School Food Service Association (ASFSA). Impact of hunger and malnutrition on student achievement. *School Board Food Service Research Review*. 1989;(1, Spring):17-21.
7. Louisiana State University AgCenter: Malnutrition Impairs U.S. Children's Health, Behavior. Accessed 7/11/2015 www.lsuagcenter.com.