

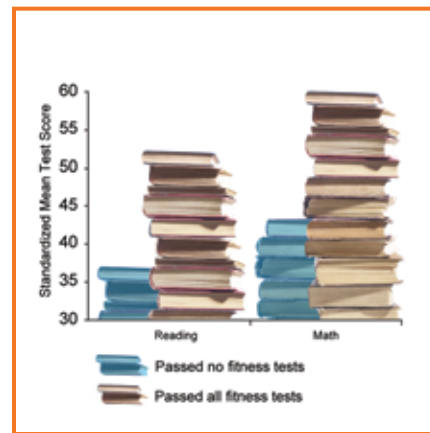


## The Link Between Children's Health, Academic Performance, and School District Economics

### Healthier Children Achieve Higher Test Scores

The knowledge and skills our children acquire in school set the foundation for them to become functioning, successful adults. Yet emerging evidence shows a profound link between a student's health—which is closely tied to nutrition and physical activity—and his or her ability to achieve academically. Although we typically think of overweight children as the most obvious target for efforts to improve eating habits and increase physical activity, helping *all* kids lead healthier lives can improve academic performance across the board. Many studies show the academic value of providing children with good nutrition and adequate physical activity, including the following:

- Students who are more physically active tend to have better grades and achieve higher test scores.
- According to a 2005 study from California, which focused on the importance of physical education in schools, students with higher fitness scores had better SAT/9 test scores for reading and math.
- In a 2005 study of Illinois children (third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders), researchers found that aerobic fitness, usually a result of being more physically active, was positively associated with cognitive function (Hillman, Castelli, & Buck, 2005).



Note. From: Physical Fitness and Academic Achievement  
Pediatric Exercise Physiology, Grissom, J., 2005; 8(1): 11-25.

*Students who participate in school nutrition programs are less likely to have discipline problems.*

- In a USDA pilot program conducted during the 2002–03 school year, 107 schools offered free fruits and vegetables to their students, either in class, in the lunchroom, or in hallways. As a result of this effort, teachers reported an increase in students' attention during class and generally better student eating behaviors (Buzby, Guthrie, & Kantor, 2003).
- In a Wisconsin school district, a comprehensive nutrition and wellness program featuring healthy foods served in the cafeteria and in vending machines and physical activity promotion was reported to substantially improve classroom behavior. Teachers and principals attributed many improvements to this program, including fewer cases of student interruptions, fidgeting, and foul language as well as improved concentration and attendance. In addition, vandalism, drug and weapons violations, and expulsions were described as “nonexistent” (Keeley, 2004).

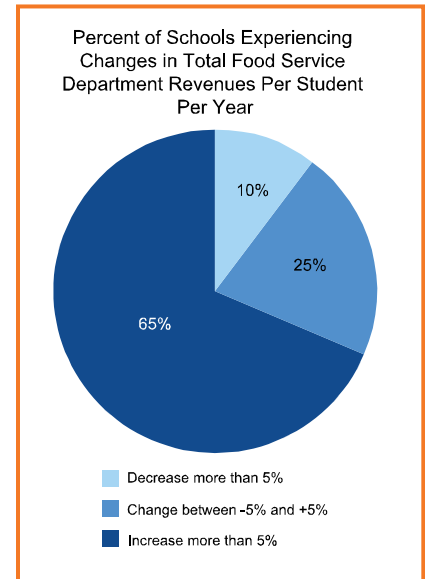
*Increased participation in school breakfast programs is associated with higher academic test scores, improved daily attendance, and better classroom behavior.*

- A 2005 review of 22 research studies concluded that eating breakfast daily may enhance students' cognitive function (particularly memory), academic performance, school attendance rates, psychosocial function, and mood. (Rampersaud, Periera, Girard, Adams, & Metzl, 2005).
- Another major research study focusing on third- through fifth-graders participating in a school breakfast program found that those students had significant gains in math, reading, and vocabulary test scores and reduced rates of tardiness and absenteeism (Meyers et al., 1989).

## Healthy Changes Lead to Healthier Finances

Making healthy changes to improve our students' academic performance can also enhance the economic performance of our schools. One of the advantages of improving nutrition in the schools—as mandated through policy change such as California's Pupil Nutrition, Health, and Achievement Act of 2001—is generating higher revenues.

- California districts that implemented new policies such as setting nutritional guidelines for “competitive” foods and beverages, including placing restrictions on sales of less healthy snack and vending machine foods, saw an increase in revenues. Out of the twenty schools evaluated:
  - 65% saw overall food service department revenues increase by more than 5%, ranging from \$20-143 per student per year.
  - 90% experienced an increase of more than 5% in revenues from meal sales and reimbursements, ranging from \$20-\$172 per student per year.
  - 80% increased the number of lunches they served, and 79% of the schools that already offered breakfast increased the number of breakfasts they served, generating more revenue overall (Center for Weight and Health, 2007).



*Note.* From Dollars and Sense: The Financial Impact of Selling Healthier School Foods. Copyright 2007 by Center for Weight and Health, University of California, Berkeley. Reprinted with permission.

## What Can You Do?

Schools can play a critical role in creating and promoting a healthy environment for children and youth. In Delaware, for example, school districts can take action by adopting and implementing comprehensive school wellness policies and practices that focus on, among other things,

- Improving access to healthier foods throughout the school campus
- Expanding opportunities for physical activity during the school day
- Enhancing nutrition education

For more information on what you can do to make Delaware's kids the healthiest in the nation, please contact NHPS at 888.494.5252 or visit us at [www.GrowUpHealthy.org](http://www.GrowUpHealthy.org)

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