The Wellness Impact: Enhancing Academic Success through Healthy School Environments

The Wellness Impact addresses why school wellness is more important than ever to students’ and our nation’s future. It illuminates the vital importance of improved nutrition and increased physical activity in ensuring a school environment that enhances students’ readiness to learn. This report brief provides highlights and key action steps of interest to parents.

For a copy of the complete report, visit www.GENYOUthNow.org.
Key Takeaways from This Report

**IT’S ALL ABOUT SCHOOLS.** Schools are key to widespread student wellness, which makes their role in a healthy future for your kids an important one. Schools can and should cultivate health-promoting behaviors and parents can help.

**THE PROOF IS IN THE BRAIN.** New research into how kids’ brains are affected by nutrition and physical activity is strengthening the learning connection, which is the idea that improved nutrition and physical activity directly affect learning.

**PAYING THE PRICE.** The costs of ignoring school wellness take many forms. Costs to kids may include poor academic achievement and reduced career prospects. Costs to schools may include high absenteeism and lower test scores. Costs to society may include higher healthcare expenses and an unprepared workforce. Yet creating health-promoting school environments is an opportunity to reduce all these costs. Countless parents nationwide have assumed the role of advocate and supporter.

**LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD.** The ability of schools to influence children’s readiness to learn is hampered by financial and social inequities. These disparities can begin to be addressed and to some extent corrected by creating health-promoting school environments that prioritize proper nutrition and physical activity.

**HOW’S YOUR SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY?** School wellness policies are mandated by federal law; however, policy implementation and enforcement varies: some districts align with national recommendations, some barely align and many don’t align at all. Now is a great time to find out about your school’s wellness policy – first to be certain you have one, and then to find out how you can help put it into practice.

**SURMOUNTING HURDLES.** Hurdles to school wellness include lack of time, financial resources and leadership, among other challenges. In spite of these barriers, school wellness is a realistic vision — one that parents can help support on behalf of their children and the future of their community.

**CULTURES OF WELLNESS ARE ACHIEVABLE.** Schools nationwide are overcoming barriers every day to achieve healthy school environments. Right now what’s important is accelerating the progress already made toward healthier schools by taking specific action. The good news is that parents’ voices and actions matter!

**IT’S A REALITY.**

Many kids aren’t getting all of the nutrients or the amount of physical activity they need, which some research suggests may affect their ability to learn and achieve academically. Schools can help by creating health-promoting environments that make the healthy choice the easy choice for students.

How? By providing kid-appealing foods — such as low-fat and fat-free milk and dairy foods, fruits, vegetables, lean proteins and whole grains — as part of a balanced, nutritious diet that is aligned with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. And also by offering classroom-based or recess-based physical activity, before/after school physical activity options as well as regular physical education classes.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:**
Healthy students are better students.

**SCHOOL BREAKFAST: SMALL STEP, BIG IMPACT**

Does your child’s school provide breakfast? School breakfast is an easy, obvious, cost-effective step to improving school and student wellness. Whether served in the cafeteria, in the classroom or grab ‘n’ go style, children who eat school breakfast…

* Are better able to learn
* Achieve higher test scores
* Are less likely to be absent from school
* Behave better in school

We can’t make kids smarter, but with improved nutrition and physical activity, we can put a better student in the chair.

— Robert Murray, MD, Department of Pediatrics, The Ohio State University

What Parents Can Do

LEAD BY EXAMPLE. Be a good role model. Eat well and move more.

DROP IN. Join your child at school to experience school lunch or breakfast firsthand.

ENCOURAGE. Urge your child to try unfamiliar, healthy foods.

INQUIRE. Reach out to your child’s principal to ask about your school’s wellness policy and ask what you can do to help make sure it’s communicated, implemented and monitored.

PITCH IN. Help your school organize walkathons and family food-and-fitness fairs, improve playground facilities or sponsor wellness-themed fundraisers.

JOIN AND LEAD. Be willing to take part in a school health advisory council or committee. Share your expertise and time to make your school/district a healthier place.

START A MOVEMENT. There’s strength in numbers. Share your enthusiasm for improving your school’s nutrition and physical activity practices with other parents.

Resources That Can Help

Many organizations and government agencies provide resources that can help schools and parents create healthy change in their district or school. Here are just a few.

Fuel Up to Play 60 (NFL and National Dairy Council) www.FuelUpToPlay60.com

Let’s Move! (launched by First Lady Michelle Obama) www.letsmove.gov


Wellness Policy Tool (Action for Healthy Kids) www.actionforhealthykids.org/for-schools/resources/tools/wellness-policy-tool.html

Breakfast in the Classroom Toolkit (School Nutrition Foundation) http://docs.schoolnutrition.org/SNF/BIC/


For a more complete listing of resources, see the full report at www.GENYOUTHNow.org.
About GENYOUTh
Founded through an unprecedented public-private partnership with the National Dairy Council (NDC) and the National Football League (NFL) and committed to child health and wellness, GENYOUTh brings leaders in health, education, government and business together in a movement to reverse childhood obesity rates. The Foundation officially launched on February 4, 2011, at Super Bowl XLV with the signing of a historic six-way Memorandum of Understanding with U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Education and Health & Human Services. GENYOUTh empowers students to improve nutrition and physical activity by taking small steps to accelerate a lifetime of healthy changes. When youth are given a voice, change can happen. For more information, visit www.GENYOUthNow.org.

About National Dairy Council
Established in 1915, National Dairy Council® (NDC), the nonprofit organization funded by the national dairy checkoff program, is committed to nutrition education and research-based communications. NDC provides science-based nutrition information to, and in collaboration with, a variety of stakeholders committed to fostering a healthier nation, including health professionals, educators, school nutrition directors, academia, industry, consumers and media. For more information, visit www.NationalDairyCouncil.org.

About the American College of Sports Medicine
The American College of Sports Medicine is the largest sports medicine and exercise science organization in the world. More than 45,000 international, national and regional members and certified professionals are dedicated to advancing and integrating scientific research to provide educational and practical applications of exercise science and sports medicine (acsm.org).

About the American School Health Association
The American School Health Association (ASHA) is the leading membership organization for school health professionals. ASHA’s mission is to build the capacity of its members to plan, develop, coordinate, implement, evaluate and advocate for effective school health strategies that contribute to optimal health and academic outcomes for all children and youth. We envision healthy students who learn and achieve in safe and healthy environments nurtured by caring adults functioning within coordinated school and community support systems (ashaweb.org).

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