



REPORT  
BRIEF FOR  
SCHOOL  
ADMINISTRATORS



# The Wellness Impact:

## Enhancing Academic Success through Healthy School Environments



*The Wellness Impact* is a GENYOUth Foundation report presented in partnership with the American College of Sports Medicine, the American School Health Association and National Dairy Council. It addresses why school wellness is more important than ever to students' and our nation's future. The report 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 school administrators.

For a copy of the complete report, visit [www.GENYOUthFoundation.org](http://www.GENYOUthFoundation.org).

## Key Takeaways from This Report

**IT'S ALL ABOUT SCHOOLS.** Schools are a key site for promoting widespread wellness policies and practices, which, in turn, support academic achievement. Health and education are mutually reinforcing. This is more relevant than ever as the rigorous Common Core State Standards raise academic expectations of schools and students nationwide.

**THE PROOF IS IN THE BRAIN.** New research into how the brain is affected by nutrition and physical activity is strengthening the learning connection argument, as neuroscience is making vividly clear the positive effects of both on students' academic achievement.

**INEQUITIES PERSIST.** Disparities in nutrition, physical activity and educational attainment tend to center on low-income and minority populations who remain most challenged when it comes to health and academic performance. These inequities can begin to be addressed and to some extent corrected through health-promoting school environments that prioritize proper nutrition and physical activity.

**IMPLEMENTATION IS UNEVEN.** Implementation of, and adherence to, school wellness policies is easier legislated than done and challenges, both systemic and practical, are very real. However, countless schools and districts have overcome daunting fiscal and other hurdles to make their wellness policies the effective tools they're intended to be.

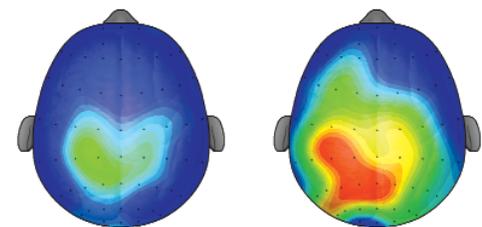
**CULTURES OF WELLNESS ARE ACHIEVABLE.** Schools nationwide are overcoming practical and systemic barriers every day to improve the nutrition and physical activity environments for their students. Right now what's important is accelerating the progress already made toward healthier schools by taking specific action.

## THE PROOF IS IN THE BRAIN

Research indicates that cognition is impacted by the quality of foods kids eat and by physical activity. Brain-imaging, a tool in the field of neuroscience, is helping us understand these connections better than ever before. The images here represent the work of Dr. Charles Hillman of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who is focusing on the relationship between physical activity and children's attention, memory and academic performance.

### Cognitive Effects of Exercise in Preadolescent Children

Average composite of 20 students' brains taking the same test after sitting quietly or taking a 20-minute walk:



After 20 minutes of  
**Sitting Quietly**

After 20 minutes of  
**Walking**

Reprinted with permission of Dr. C. H. Hillman.

With the help of neuroimaging, we're learning that:

- \* Physical fitness may benefit cognition and brain health as well as academic performance.
- \* Early physical activity experiences may shape the brain and its functions.

Physical activity may positively impact students' academic performance, *whether it comes during PE class, recess, in the classroom or before/after school.*

### SCHOOL BREAKFAST: A FAST AND EFFECTIVE STEP TO IMPROVE SCHOOL AND STUDENT WELLNESS

School breakfast is an easy, obvious, cost-effective step to improving school and student wellness. Research indicates students, particularly those nutritionally at-risk, who eat breakfast have higher school attendance rates, achieve higher math and reading scores, perform better on standardized tests and have fewer behavior problems. Plus, breakfast makes **economic sense**. School breakfast programs have been shown to have serious revenue-producing potential, even more so than school lunch, especially when schools with high numbers of free and reduced-price eligible students begin offering it. Breakfast can be served in the cafeteria, in the classroom or grab 'n' go style. *See full report, Section 2, for references.*

# What School Administrators Can Do

Education organizations, health advocacy organizations and government agencies are calling for school administrators to lead the way to creating healthy schools. Here are some action steps school leaders can take right now:

- \* Assume a leadership role in setting tone and vision for healthy schools.
- \* Communicate the link between nutrition, physical activity and academic achievement.
- \* Establish a district or school wellness council or school health advisory committee to develop and implement a strong school wellness policy.
- \* Involve students in program planning, implementation and participation.
- \* Gather data about health and wellness policies and practices in your school or district — and evaluate their impact.
- \* Offer or expand school breakfast, including alternative breakfast opportunities.
- \* Make sure all food served and sold at school, including school meals and competitive foods, is appealing, nutritious and aligned with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- \* Ensure that high-quality, standards-based physical education and health education is offered to all students in all grades.
- \* Provide recess for elementary school students and in-class physical activity breaks for all students.
- \* Offer additional opportunities for students to be physically active, including extracurricular activities and active transportation to school.
- \* Reach out to families and community partners to gain their support.
- \* Be a healthy role model and encourage other adults to be role models for healthy eating and regular physical activity.

## As a school administrator, your voice matters.

Use the checklist below to identify day-to-day opportunities to enhance school wellness.

- Do your staff members and the community at large know that you support school wellness? And is that reflected in the nutrition and physical activity environments in your district?
- Do you offer breakfast programs in every school? Prescribed curriculum hours for physical education?
- Do you solicit input from parents, teachers, school nutrition staff and directly involve students in creating a healthier school environment?

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

- Do the teachers and school nutrition managers in your school(s) have in-service training in nutrition and/or physical activity, and are they aware of the key role they play in school wellness?
- Has enough time been allotted for nutrition education? Physical Education? Recess?
- Do students have enough time to eat, and do they do so in a safe and comfortable dining area?
- Do teachers and administrators in your school occasionally eat school breakfast or lunch, spending valuable time with students and other staff?
- Is your school or district providing alternative serving options to encourage participation in breakfast, such as grab 'n' go breakfasts?
- Are vending machines stocked with low-fat and fat-free milk and dairy foods, 100% fruit juice and other nutritious snacks? Have high calorie/low-nutrient foods been prohibited?
- Have you ever promoted your commitment to school wellness through local media?

### About GENYOUth Foundation

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.GENYOUthFoundation.org](http://www.GENYOUthFoundation.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](http://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](http://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](http://ashaweb.org)).

Copyright © 2013

## Resources That Can Help

*Numerous organizations and government agencies provide resources that can help school leaders create change in their district or school. Here are just a few.*

### Breakfast in the Classroom Toolkit

(School Nutrition Foundation)

<http://docs.schoolnutrition.org/SNF/BIC/>

### Coordinated School Health Resources

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

[www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/cshp](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/cshp)

### Fuel Up to Play 60

(NFL and National Dairy Council)

[www.FuelUpToPlay60.com](http://www.FuelUpToPlay60.com)

### HealthierUS School Challenge

(U.S. Department of Agriculture)

[www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/index.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/index.html)

### Let's Move!

(launched by First Lady Michelle Obama)

[www.letsmove.gov](http://www.letsmove.gov)

### Presidential Youth Fitness Program

(President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition)

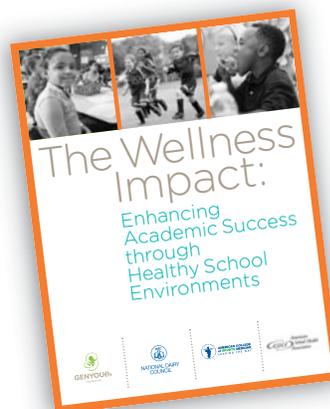
[www.presidentialyouthfitnessprogram.org](http://www.presidentialyouthfitnessprogram.org)

### What School Administrators Can Do to Enhance Student Learning by Supporting a Coordinated Approach to Health

(American School Health Association)

[www.ashaweb.org/files/public/Miscellaneous/Administrators\\_Coordinated\\_Approach\\_Support.pdf](http://www.ashaweb.org/files/public/Miscellaneous/Administrators_Coordinated_Approach_Support.pdf)

*For a more complete listing of resources of value to school leaders, see the full report at [www.GENYOUthFoundation.org](http://www.GENYOUthFoundation.org).*



**For a copy of the complete report — including references and other supporting materials — visit [www.GENYOUthFoundation.org](http://www.GENYOUthFoundation.org).**



This report was produced with generous funding support from the Midwest Dairy Council.