



Better Nutrition and **More** Physical Activity Can Boost Student **Achievement** and Schools' Bottom Line

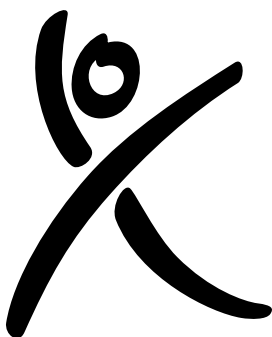
Rising problems with poor nutrition and physical inactivity—and the resulting weight and health problems—waken student academic achievement. This can cost school districts millions of dollars each year.

As schools search for solutions to meet performance outcomes and minimize budget cuts, it is critical that they don't further aggravate problems of poor nutrition and inactive lifestyles, thus undermining their overall goal of providing high-quality education for all students.

Instead, providing healthful food options and increasing students' physical activity can help schools meet academic performance goals and improve the financial bottom line for schools and communities.

Poor nutrition and physical inactivity cost schools academic achievement.

- A strong link exists between nutrition, physical activity, and academic success.
- Schools with high percentages of students who do not routinely engage in physical activity or eat well have smaller gains in test scores than other schools.
- Children who eat breakfast show improved cognitive function, attention, and memory.
- Children who don't get adequate nutrients have lower test scores. Even transient hunger from missing a meal affects performance.



Poor nutrition and physical inactivity cost schools time.

- Extra staff time is needed to:
 - assist students with low academic performance or behavior problems caused by poor nutrition and physical inactivity.
 - administer medications needed by students with associated health problems.
- Poor nutrition, physical inactivity, and overweight among school employees increases absenteeism and reduces productivity, while also increasing healthcare costs.

Poor nutrition and physical inactivity cost schools and communities money.

- It is counter-productive to sell foods that compete with school meals. Foods sold “a la carte” or through vending machines are often low in nutrients and high in calories. But when kids buy these foods, participation in school meals is reduced. This means schools receive lower reimbursement from the USDA’s National School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program.
- Student absenteeism can cost schools money. Poor nutrition, physical inactivity, and weight problems may lead to more missed school days due to increased risk of getting sick, increased dental problems, and other physical, psychological, and social problems.
- Severely overweight students, according to one study, miss one day of school each month.
 - In states such as Texas that use attendance to help determine state funding, a single-day absence by just one student can cost a school district anywhere from \$9 to \$20.
 - If children miss just one day per month, this could cost a large school district like Houston Independent School District as much as **\$5.5 million each year**.
- Overweight and obese children tend to become overweight and obese adults, thus compounding the problem in the future. In 2004, the State of Texas calculated the direct and indirect costs of obesity-related medical issues for all Texans—children *and* adults—and concluded that the 2010 price tag could reach \$15.6 billion and, by 2040, a staggering \$39 billion.

This fact sheet is based on information in *The Learning Connection: The Value of Improving Nutrition and Physical Activity in Our Schools*, produced by Action for Healthy Kids; available at www.ActionForHealthyKids.org.

Additional data sources:

The Burden of Overweight and Obesity in Texas: The Costs in Dollars and Lives, Texas Department of Agriculture, 2004 (www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/pdf/Cost_Obesity_ExecSumm.pdf).

“Breakfast for Learning,” Food Research and Action Center (www.frac.org/pdf/breakfastforlearning.PDF).

Counting Costs and Calories: Measuring the Cost of Obesity to Texas Employers, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 2007 (www.window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/obesitycost/96-1245costscalories.pdf).