



# A New Beginning in 2009

Volume 1, Issue 6

January, 2009

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## Brain Power in Breakfast

As a new semester begins, instill in students the value of eating breakfast each morning and emphasize the words *healthy breakfast*.

Breakfast meals containing a lot of sugar with little nutritional value need to be avoided. "Choosing breakfast foods that are rich in whole grains, fiber, and protein while low in added sugar may boost kids' attention span, concentration, and memory which are needed for learning" (KidsHealth, 2009).

Encouraging students to eat a healthy breakfast is a win-win for both the student and the teacher. The student learns and the teacher's efforts are productive.

If time is a factor, integrate health into the curriculum by asking students to write a "how-to" on preparing a fast, healthy breakfast (peanut butter on a bagel with fresh fruit and low-fat milk or a breakfast smoothie). Students may also write a persuasive summary on the importance of breakfast for acquiring needed nutrients.



*"Skipping breakfast can make kids feel tired, restless, or irritable."*  
(KidsHealth, 2009)

Research has shown that a healthy breakfast each morning "tends to keep weight under control, lowers blood cholesterol levels and results in fewer school absences" (KidsHealth, 2009).

## A Weighty Problem

"According to a recent report by doctor's at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, backpacks are a weighty problem for some students" (Education World, 2009). Overloaded backpacks or shoulder bags are leading to more complaints from students including tingling hands, back pain, and muscle

spasms. Dr. Jane Benson recommends the following:

- \*Well-padded straps
- \*A bag with multiple compartments that makes weight distribution easier.
- \* Place heavier items near the top. "That way, the legs are carrying most of the weight" (Education

World, 2009).

\*Do the math! "Never carry a backpack that weighs more than 20 percent of your body weight" (Education World, 2009).

How much weight is your class carrying? Weigh student backpacks to find the surprising answer!

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### Special points of interest:

- ♦ *The swift spread of germs.*
- ♦ *Fun food facts.*
- ♦ *Trading fries for vegetables.*
- ♦ *Sedentary concerns.*
- ♦ *Understanding the food grade pyramid.*
- ♦ *The benefits of snacking.*

## “No Thanks!”

Unfortunately, germs cause colds, viruses, and other infections often impacting classroom and school attendance. The importance of washing hands is understood when students realize how quickly and easily germs spread. Here’s a simple outdoor lesson:

\*Divide the class into five groups.

\*Give each group a different color of glitter



*“Invite the school nurse to participate in this activity and to help add to the discussion.”  
(Education World, 2009)*

provided in a flat container.

\*Ask each student to place their hand, palm side down, into the container of glitter.

\*When groups are ready, ask students to take turns shaking hands firmly with at least one member from each of the other groups.

\*When students are done, ask them to look at their hands and an-

swer the following questions in a journal entry: Is there more of one color of glitter than another? Why might this be; why do you think you have more of this color? If glitter were germs, how are germs spread? How does this activity make you feel towards hand washing? Do you think you will wash your hands more often now? Why or why not?

## Fun Facts!

How much do we really understand when it comes to food? When a few minutes are available here and there during the school week, ask students to answer some challenging questions with the answers “true” or “false.” Here are some examples:

\*A plain baked potato is almost 100% fat free. (true)

\*Water is the best liquid to drink. (true)

*“How much do you know about vegetables, fruits and other foods?”  
(Education World, 2009)*

\*Tomatoes and potatoes are in the same food family. (true)

\*One serving of fruits or vegetables is one cup. (false)

\*Your body temperature rises when you eat ice cream. (true)

\*There’s little water in potatoes. (false)

Challenge students to create their own statements for the class to vote on. For added math opportunity, what is the class percentage that believes the statement is true? False?

## Please, Skip the Fries!

Trendy fast-food meals make their way into the vast majority of student diets. American culture’s fascination with quick, easy meal delivery have led to high-calorie, low nutritional intake. “There are many obstacles to children’s good nutrition today, including advertising efforts of the fast food industry that are aimed at children” (Education World, 2009).

The last few years have brought changes to the fast food industry including offering fruits and vegetables instead of chips and fries. Dr. Antonia Demas, president of the Food Studies Institute, says there’s “a perception that kids will not eat healthy foods,



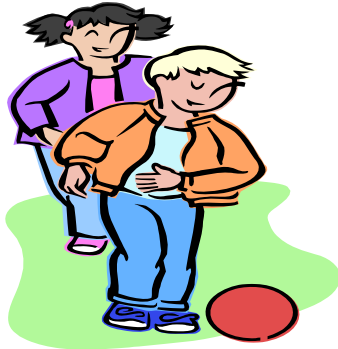
but they will if they receive positive education that is hands-on and sensory-based” (Education World, 2009).

*“Schools are meeting nutritional challenges by using exercise curricula!”  
(Education World, 2009)*

## Educators & Exercise

Televisions, computers, and other electronic devices have impacted more than our forms of communication. Our technological advances have also contributed to the lack of exercise as “kids are becoming more sedentary”

(KidsHealth, 2009). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) reports that “the average child is watching about 3 hours of television a



*“School-age children should not be inactive for periods longer than 2 hours.”*  
(Kids Health, 2009)

day” and the Kaiser Family Foundation has reported similar results stating that 5.5 hours are spent daily on all media combined (KidsHealth, 2009).

When educators have the opportunity, exercise incorporated into lessons gives learning an added boost. “Kids who are physically fit sleep better and are better able to handle the physical and emo-

tional challenges that a typical day presents – be that running to catch a bus, bending down to tie a shoe, or studying for a test” (KidsHealth, 2009). Stretching after a lesson or performing ten quiet jumping jacks helps students refocus.

When classroom correction leads to loss of recess, a student needs to have some form of structured energy release. Instead of “no recess,” ask the student to walk the perimeter of the playground or jump up and down a specified number of times.

## Snacking

“Experts say that snacking on the *right* foods is not harmful; In fact, it can have health benefits for kids of all ages” (WebMD, 2009). Encourage students to drink plenty of water and bring healthy snacks to school, like fruits and vegetables. “Many kids eat lunch early and then have an afternoon of classes and maybe even an after-school activity before their next chance to eat”

(KidsHealth, 2009). Snack size portions of pretzels or nuts can be filling while apples, oranges, and bananas are easy to peel and carry; all of these offer good nutritional value as well as an energy boost. “Studies show that snacking during the school day improves both mood and motivation, and may impact concentration. Snacks may help children maintain performance during times of high mental demand, like

*“A good snack should take no more time to eat than it does to prepare!”*  
(Kids Health, 2009)

when taking an exam or making a class presentation” (WebMD, 2009).

## Food Guide Pyramid

Challenge students to “evaluate the nutritional value of their favorite foods by using the food guide pyramid established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture” (Education World, 2009). The pyramid provides the opportunity for students to analyze food portion sizes and the importance of a well-balanced diet. Here’s a step-by-step lesson example:

- 1) Display or provide copies of the food guide pyramid to students.
- 2) Discuss the pyramid including food group areas and serving portions.
- 3) Ask students to list their top five or ten favorite foods. Where are these foods located on



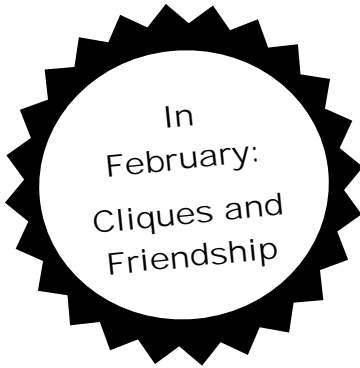
*“Have students discuss and write their responses.”*  
(Education World, 2009)

the pyramid?

- 4) Ask students to divide their list into two columns – healthy and not healthy.
- 5) Ask students to write what they’ve discovered and if any changes are needed in their diet.

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## January Q&A

*Q: Some students are not particularly athletic and would rather read. How can educators encourage students who are not comfortable with sports?*

Not all students enjoy sports and that's okay. There are other activities students might enjoy that will not focus on "points" or endurance. Swimming, dancing, walking, running or skating are physical activities that students may enjoy without pressure. "They're also exercising when they're at recess, riding bikes, or playing tag" (KidsHealth, 2009). Encourage students to not discount sports as a whole; you can throw a baseball to someone but prefer not to play in a "baseball" game. The same can be said for soccer or football. Students can keep a journal of their exercise in a week and calculate how many minutes were active compared to those that were inactive (sleeping, watching television, playing on the computer).



## Resources:

Education World. "Backpacks=Backaches for Some Kids." [http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/lesson/lesson007.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson007.shtml) (accessed January, 2009).

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