

School Readiness: Healthy Kids are Better Learners



PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTER
at TULANE UNIVERSITY

To improve school readiness, we have to serve children healthy food, limit screen time and provide daily exercise before kindergarten.



Eating Habits Start Early:

- Learning about new and different food in early childhood **promotes healthy food choices for a lifetime.** While young children are often resistant to trying new foods, it doesn't mean the child won't accept it after several attempts.¹¹
- The increase in children drinking sugary drinks over the past 10 years coincides with the **rising childhood obesity rates.**¹²

Children with good overall health perform better in school.¹⁻³ The **preschools years are a crucial time** for children and influence their development of many long-term habits and behaviors, such as food preferences, physical activity, cognition and motor skills.⁴⁻⁵



Health-related habits, such as physical inactivity and a poor diet, are **"consistently linked to poor grades and test scores and lower educational attainment,"** according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.⁶

Students who are obese, even as early as kindergarten, tend to have **poorer math and reading scores** than their non-obese counterparts later in school.³ Students who suffer from overweight or obesity also tend to have higher rates of **absenteeism**, but this can change by increasing access to health services, improving diet, and increasing physical activity.¹

Too Much Screen Time Hurts Academics:

- By the time children turn 10, every additional hour of television they watched as toddlers is associated with **lower math scores and overall school achievement**, as well as reduced physical activity and victimization by classmates.⁸
- 64% of babies and toddlers in the U.S. are watching TV and videos, averaging about 2 hours per day.⁹



Why The Urgency?

- Louisiana has no state-specific nutritional standards for childcare food other than following the minimum federal requirements issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. There are no limits to screen time or requirements for physical activity.
- **Childcare facilities are ground zero** for many children to develop habits and behaviors because of the amount of time spent in such facilities.
- In the U.S., 6 in 10 children under age 6 spend an average of **28 hours per week in childcare facilities.** Roughly 230,000 Louisiana children under age 6 are in need of childcare because of parents in the workforce.⁷

Active Kids Pay Attention In Class:

- Research shows children are more attentive and learn better after periods of physical activity. Regular exercise helps children develop **"processes required to select, organize, and properly initiate goal-directed actions."**¹⁰

Kids are school ready when they're healthy!

- Strategies for Early Childhood Health & School Readiness -

- No screen time for children under the age of 2. Limit sedentary screen time in front of televisions and other electronic devices to 1-2 hours a day for children ages 2-5.
- Require 1 hour of adult-led physical activity per day. For infants and children with disabilities, engage in “tummy time” or other activities appropriate for age and abilities.
- Implement the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s latest recommendations - via policy memos, manuals, etc. - on meeting standards in the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010.
- Food will not be used as reward or punishment.
- Include parents in healthy-eating and physical activity programs by giving at-home educational materials and activities.
- Screen children for age-appropriate BMI (Body Mass Index) once a year and notify parents of changes.

The items listed above are based on recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Institute of Medicine, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education, and American Heart Association.



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