Food for thought

Business

Calculus and crackers, biology and blueberries, English and edamame — schoolwork and snacks go together. Yet some schools forbid eating outside of the scheduled lunch period. Studies show that eating allows for better focus and cognitive function than remaining hungry.

Despite limiting the learning capacities of students by forbidding them from eating in class, schools have no right to control such a basic need for people. Schools should not prohibit eating and drinking outside of the lunchroom because hunger hampers learning more than eating in class, some students can not follow the lunch schedule for health reasons, and students' extended hunger can lead to overeating. Hunger impacts students' ability to learn, making it more detrimental to education than eating in class. People's brains require glucose to function and think efficiently like a machine needs oil to allow the gears to move smoothly. Studies show " the link between nutrition and cognitive ability has been well established" (Figlio 3).

Meaning that if students are limited to eating only during lunch periods, they may not have enough energy to maintain healthy brain function. Eating when the body needs it helps the brain stay active and well functioning because it has energy to burn from glucose. In a study about nutrition in schools shows " a substantial … gain in cognitive ability from the consumption of glucose … which provides a boost in energy" (Figlio 5-6).

In addition to impacting learning, some students struggle to follow the restrictive lunch schedule because of health issues. Athletes, students with as-yet undiagnosed metabolic conditions and those who are prone to significant symptoms with low blood sugar need to eat more often than a

school schedule allows. Many athletes need to eat more frequently than once in a seven-hour school day. To consume the number of calories that they burn, athletes need to eat significantly more than they can in just the lunch period. The average high-intensity high school athlete needs to consume between 3, 000 and 5, 000 calories a day to be healthy (Rockwell). Eating in class will allow them to reach that high requirement.

Low blood sugar is another serious issue. Some students experience " blurred vision, lightheaded[ness], trouble concentrating and/or irregular heartbeat" when they have low blood sugar (Funnell). I, for one, get head-splitting migraines and fatigue if my blood sugar gets low. This can be easily avoided if adolescents are allowed to have a morsel between meals to maintain their blood sugar levels. Thus, it is healthier for students to control their own food intake. In addition to the necessity to maintain metabolic levels, not eating when hungry can lead to unhealthy habits.

Prolonged hunger tends to cause overeating at the next meal, which leads to unhealthy habits. When students have just completed many strenuous hours of classwork and tests, they become very hungry when they are not allowed to eat anything before lunch. As a result, many students eat more than they normally would at that meal. Data shows that when a breakfast is skipped, "..

. intake at lunch as well as hunger ratings [are] significantly increased" (Levitsky). This overeating can become a habit, so even when a student is not ravenous beforehand, they will still eat to excess because that has become normal for them, possibly leading to weight problems. On the other

hand, if students are allowed have something when they start feeling “ a mite peckish,” it can help people to be healthier in this age of obesity. Evidence shows that eating habits as a result of “..

. improper eating behaviours [because] children consume an excess amount of energy; and their diet is deficient in elements necessary for proper development” (Sunram-Lea). This is a slippery slope of bad eating habits that can have detrimental lifelong effects because, “ eating habits are usually formed in early childhood” (Sunram-Lea). In spite of all the compelling evidence that students should be able to eat when hungry, there are schools that prohibit eating outside of the assigned lunch period. There is much logic in establishing a policy of not eating outside the cafeteria.

The more that students eat outside of the lunchroom, the more crumbs, wrappers and spills there will be, leading to more work for the janitors and cleaning staff. More work for people who already work hard cleaning the entire school every night. As well, eating can be disruptive to other students who are trying to focus on the teacher. However, not everyone is able to be always full and focused. In the end, it is better to allow students to eat a quick snack and get back to learning rather than forcing them to be hungry and distracted for hours. Even having a rule requiring students to only eat between classes would be an improvement.

There is distinct evidence supporting the benefits of students eating and drinking when hungry. The supporting reasons — health reasons, hunger is more distracting and teaching bad habits — far outweigh the opposition — slightly more mess and the disruption of eating. If students protest to regain

their fundamental right to eat and drink, their voices will be heard. For this reason, I urge you to contact your school principal and tell him/her your view on this poorly thought-out rule and request a repeal of it. All students will be healthier and better-educated if this policy is rescinded. Work Cited Figlio, David N.

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