

What Happens in Schools Today Can Make a Difference in the Success of Our Nation Tomorrow

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**Alexis Glick and
David Satcher,
MD, PhD**

According to a [report published by Harvard this year](#), the U.S. ranks 25th in math, 17th in science and 14th in reading compared to 30 other countries. While there are undoubtedly many diverse reasons

for these low rankings, multiple factors influencing a child's ability to learn in school are likely contributing to the problem.

Physical education and recess have been cut drastically. The majority of kids do not eat adequate amounts of nutrient-dense foods, those essential for growth and development. As we speak, over [17 million children live in food insecure homes](#), not knowing where their next meal will come from, and [less than half of our nation's children eat breakfast daily](#). The bitter irony is that children are both overweight and undernourished.

In 2004, Action for Healthy Kids' "The Learning Connection" report highlighted the link between nutrition, activity and learning -- and the cost to schools of not improving their food and activity environments. We've witnessed many positive results -- from all sectors of society -- since this report. These efforts need to not only continue, but also escalate.

It's no secret that multiple health benefits stem from improved nutrition and physical activity. But the Learning Connection is less well known among administrators, educators and parents. And even when the correlation IS known, how do they -- how do we -- bring it to the forefront in the face of competing priorities and constraints?

On September 18th and 19th, GENYOUth Foundation will convene thought leaders and decision-makers at the Nutrition + Physical Activity Learning Connection Summit in Arlington, VA. These unique stakeholders -- iconic American corporations; health, fitness and education associations and related individuals; leaders in government and academia and students themselves -- bring different points of view, innovative products and services, and diverse experiences to unlock solutions to the challenges faced by our Nation's schools.

The Summit, in partnership with the National Dairy Council, the National Football League, the American College of Sports Medicine and the American School Health Association, will further explore the connection that physical activity and nutrition have to learning and behavior and examine barriers and opportunities to help schools establish wellness policies and practices. Together we realize the urgent need to create an unprecedented collaboration between the public and private sector to educate and reinvigorate the Learning Connection conversation.

Today is about examining the growing body of research focused on the association between physical activity, school-based physical education, school breakfast consumption, improved nutrition and learning. We aim to draw meaningful conclusions, identify knowledge gaps, develop practical approaches to leverage the current science and re-commit to working with and through schools to enhance children's health and readiness to learn. Most importantly, we aim to empower our nation's youth. Our children must be at the center of this conversation as they are the best advocates for change in their environments.

America's schools reach over 55 million kids a day, with the potential to provide up to half of their daily nutrition needs and offer them opportunities for scheduled or unscheduled physical activity 180 days a year. For this reason, we believe the solution begins in schools.

There is an expectation that change happens on the ground at the school level, but resources are scarce, support is stretched and the individuals "in the trenches" are often fighting an uphill battle. And while schools have made much progress, they need our help.

It's conventional wisdom that the future of our country will be determined by our children. One in five children in America -- one in four among minorities -- [are obese](#), and 70-80% of kids who are overweight at the age of 12 grow up to be [obese adults](#). These statistics have dire implications for children, families, businesses and society. As we look at our current generation of youth, there is a risk that they will not reach their full potential, and a serious likelihood that they'll have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. This is nothing short of the most pressing public health challenge of our time.

It's one thing to do well on standardized tests. It's another to watch our kids become sedentary and lose all ability to play, learn and nourish their minds. The Learning Connection Summit is about shifting the discussion to embrace the fact that healthy behaviors and academic achievement are mutually reinforcing -- and explore what we can do about this today for a brighter, more productive tomorrow.

Healthier, more active lifestyles for our children, and the proven benefits such lifestyles bring -- not just physically, but also academically and economically -- must be supported. Healthy students learn better. Fun is fundamental. When schools work with students to address academic requirements along with nutrition and physical activity needs, they improve health and readiness to learn, and contribute immeasurably to the long-term success not only of our children, but of our country as well.

About GENYOUth Foundation

Founded through an unprecedented public-private partnership with the National Dairy Council (NDC) and the National Football League (NFL) committed to child health and wellness, GENYOUth brings leaders in health, education, government and business together in a movement to reverse childhood obesity rates. GENYOUth's flagship program, Fuel Up to Play (FUTP60) -- the in-school program empowers students to "get active and play" for 60 minutes daily and "fuel up" with nutrient-rich foods like low-fat and fat-free milk and milk products, fruits, vegetables and whole grains. FUTP60 is largest health and wellness program in schools across the country with more than 73,000 schools enrolled reaching 38 million students. FUTP60 schools can apply for "Funds for Fuel Up to Play 60" (\$1,000-\$4,000) at http://school.fueluptoplay60.com/funds/funds_for_futp60.php. Since the program launched in 2010 \$8 million in mini-grants have been given to nearly 3,000 schools. For more information, visit www.genyouthfoundation.org.