

Students pay the price for unhealthy cafeteria choices

by Mariana Irby
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What's for lunch today? For many students, including those here at Princeton High School, it's greasy pizza, French fries, mounds of pasta drenched in fatty Alfredo sauce, and drinks that contain as much sugar as two cans of soda. Vegetables? Don't even go there.

It's common knowledge that school cafeterias sell unhealthy foods to students, and PHS's cafeteria is no different.

Students and administrators need to examine facts regarding school cafeterias and obesity in order to bring about a healthier change in the cafeteria.

There is no denying the soaring rates of overweight and obese teenagers in the United States.

According to childhood obesity statistics, net, 18.1 percent of American teenagers in 2008 suffered from obesity, a serious medical condition that results in the second-highest number of preventable deaths in the United States.

Not only do most Americans eat far too much of what they don't need (refined carbohydrates, fatty meats, or packaged foods), but a shockingly high number deprive themselves of the essential nutrients to maintaining good health.

According to a recent New York Times article, "Even Benefits Don't Tempt Us to Vegetables" by Jane E. Brody, only 26 percent of Americans eat at least the minimum daily-recommended servings of vegetables.

All this, despite the fact that people in this "developed country" can afford fresh fruits, vegetables, and unrefined carbohydrates.

With obesity rates among teenagers reaching record highs, high school cafeterias should be taking the initiative and providing healthy meals to students rather than escalating the problem by continuing to offer unhealthy lunch choices.

Schools undoubtedly need to take more responsibility for providing healthy foods for students.

Childhood obesity, an increasingly prevalent and highly embarrassing disease, not only puts physical stress on a child's body but also psychological stress in terms of being accepted into friend groups and society as a whole.

According to a study conducted by Dr. Richard Strauss in 2000, obese children were more likely to have low self-esteem and significantly higher feelings of loneliness and anxiety.

These psychological factors could lead to a whole slew of other problems, some of which might have been easily prevented had these children

eaten healthier meals.

Because school is one of the deciding factors in students' eating habits, it could also facilitate healthy eating.

While obesity may not be the most pressing issue for students at PHS, it is still an ultimate concern.

Meanwhile, students should realize that eating healthy will benefit them in the long run.

Providing students with healthier lunch options would inculcate healthy lifestyle choices in maturing adolescents and instill positive eating habits. If the school were to make the widely available cafeteria food

more healthy, students would become more health-conscious and would grow into more balanced adults.

Ellis Bloom '13 agreed, noting if cafeteria food options were healthier, "Students would be more conscious of their health because they would be having healthy food more often."

The damage that the repeated intake of unhealthy cafeteria foods causes is both physical and psychological and can be permanent.

If the school simply cannot afford to provide us with healthy lunches at this time because of the financial strain it would cause, it seems that for now the best option is for students to pack their own

lunches from home.

It may take a little more effort, but at least students have the option of eating a balanced diet and keeping themselves healthy. As Leila Schochet '12 said, bringing her own lunch from home is "an easy way to maintain healthy food choices."

If more students packed lunches and fewer students used the cafeteria, it would send a message to the school that the food offered is inadequate and must be changed to meet our needs.

Despite its prevalence, obesity is ultimately a preventable health condition, and getting those 3 servings of vegetables every day is surprisingly simple. For example, a large salad - excluding fatty or sugary dressings and fried pieces of meat - often contains more than one serving.

Making the right food choices will always benefit in the long run.

So as you strive to maintain a healthy lifestyle, do your best to shove away the greasy chicken and salty soup and opt for a meal that is better for you. □

Healthier lunch options would inculcate healthy lifestyle choices.

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graphic by Isaac Howell



photo illustration by Victoria Ehrbhar

The Athlete's Advantage

by Marissa Delikouras
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What goes into the recipe for academic success? Organization, strong study habits, and attentiveness in class are all widely accepted ingredients. But what about participation in sports? For critics, playing a sport is like substituting salt for sugar in a cookie recipe - in other words, a detriment to success.

Sports are often viewed as a time-consuming distraction from education and sometimes blamed for academic failures. However,

involvement in athletics alone certainly does not lead to a drop in grades. If anything, it may enhance academic performance.

Scientific research shows a correlation between participation in athletics and a high degree of academic achievement, proving that athletes tend to obtain higher GPAs than non-athletes.

In studies conducted in 1986 by Donald Soltz and 1991 by Gary Nuhn, the performance of

approximately 126,000 students from 133 high schools across North Carolina was measured over the period of an entire school year.

Athletics provide a variety of benefits both in and out of class.

The objective was to determine whether or not student-athletes apply themselves better in school than their non-athlete counterparts.

The final results revealed that the average GPA of students who participated in sports was 21.6 percent higher than that of students who did not participate.

One of the most common arguments against playing a sport is the fact that it takes up a substantial amount of time that could otherwise be used for studying and homework.

Those hours spent running up and down a soccer field, hitting tennis balls over a net, and sprinting around a track should instead go towards improving one's grades, right?

According to many of the student-athletes and staff at PHS, this is not the way things work. "My own experience tells me

that sports create a circumstance under which students are forced to become more organized and better with time management," said Mr. Miranda, athletic director at PHS.

Miranda believes that when athletes take a season off, they tend to procrastinate a great deal and lose the intense mentality that they develop during the season. As a result, grades may suffer.

Sydney Watts '13 confessed, "When I'm not playing field hockey, I'm less bus[y] but also less focused...so I end up wasting a lot of time."

Another positive aspect of athletics is that they can lead to the development of skills that are useful in the classroom, such as dedication, teamwork, or responsibility.

"For me, sports teach and instill diligence and hard work," said Veronica Spann '11. "This relays into my academic life."

Playing a sport may also improve concentration levels which can directly translate into the athlete's progress as a student.

In line with a USA Today article published in April that cited the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, physical activity can "improve blood flow and oxygen to the brain, improving mental clarity."

Sports may also enhance "connections between nerves in the brain, thus improving attention and information-processing skills."

Since high school students are constantly being exposed to a wide variety of information, the ability to concentrate is a key component of success in school.

Physical activity may lead to a higher GPA and better health.

Simon Gabriel '14 believes that participating in sports helps him release energy and feel less "jumpy" when he sits down to complete school work. "I can focus

so much better after a good workout," said Gabriel. "Also, I've noticed that ever since I started running cross country, my work ethic has improved, and I'm more disciplined."

The idea that sports hinder academic performance is a lofty misconception. Athletics provide a variety of benefits both in and out of the classroom, and should become a regular part of every student's life.

Principal Gary Snyder said that he encourages all students to get involved in some sort of extracurricular activity.

"Sports are an excellent option," he said. "They contribute in a positive way, because they allow students to become more connected to their school, form close relationships with other students and adults, and achieve a higher level of academic success." □