Unit Title: *Researching for Persuasion, A Writing Workshop*

Grade Level: *7th*

Length of Unit: *5 – 6 Days, or 2 Weeks*

Teacher Name: *Ms. Emily Wiseman*

School: *Montera Middle School, Oakland, CA*
Overview of unit:

The main focus of writing in 7th grade is on persuasive writing. This form of writing is still relatively new to the students, and is one of the more difficult genres to write about for the STAR writing test if one knows nothing about it. However, I have found that investing just a little bit of time teaching and showing students examples of persuasive writing have paid off when it came to the district writing assessment at the beginning of the year and the STAR writing test in March. Once students are informed of the proper format of persuasive writing, and are given a topic that they feel passionate about, they usually come through with a decent writing piece. While I have taught smaller mini-lessons on persuasive writing at different intervals, the purpose of this unit was to create a big, “official” writing workshop. In addition to teaching the persuasive essay, I have decided to include elements of a research paper. When I taught the persuasive writing workshop last year, I required my students to conduct research, but I didn’t have a clear instructional path to teach the elements of a research paper. I hope that by hybridizing these two genres, students will learn not only how to create a solid persuasive piece, but also how to research effectively to gather information that will be beneficial to them in their writing.

One of the biggest elements of research includes internet research and, while we do not have a working computer lab at our school, a large majority of my students have internet access at home. For those with no internet, I have two computers in my classroom with internet access and a printer that will be made available to them during this time. I will also be tailoring the research topics myself and I will make books and other types of research available to students (there is not a working library at our school, either).

Essential Questions:

◊ What are the three elements of a good persuasive essay? (Answer: 1. Opinion Statement, 2. Evidence, examples and facts, 3. Addressing the counterargument)
◊ How can you persuade someone to agree with you? (Answer: By writing a great persuasive essay!)

Standards Assessed:

- Writing Applications 2.0: Students write persuasive texts of at least 500-700 words. The writing demonstrates a command of standard American English and the research, organizational, and drafting strategies outlined in Writing Standard 1.0.

- Writing Applications 2.3: Write research reports
  o A. Pose relevant and tightly drawn questions about the topic
  o B. Convey clear and accurate perspectives on the subject
  o C. Include evidence compiled through the formal research process

- Writing Applications 2.4: Write persuasive compositions
  o A. State a clear position or perspective in support of a proposition or proposal
  o B. Describe points in support of the proposition, employing well-articulated evidence
  o C. Anticipate and address reader concerns and counterarguments
Learning Outcomes:
1. SWBAT define the three important elements of a persuasive composition
2. SWBAT select a researchable topic for their persuasive essay
3. SWBAT write an opinion statement about their topic
4. SWBAT identify and explain their target audience
5. SWBAT identify the counterargument
6. SWBAT identify the elements of a reliable website
7. SWBAT conduct research to support their opinion statement
8. SWBAT address the counterargument
9. SWBAT identify research questions to research their topic
10. SWBAT identify and evaluate different research sources
11. SWBAT conduct research to find an appropriate amount of information
12. SWBAT use research to support their opinion statement
13. SWBAT outline and create a rough draft of their persuasive paper
14. SWBAT self-and peer edit persuasive essays

Curriculum Materials and Resources:
- HOLT Literature and Language Arts, First Course. 2003 (Textbook, website resources and Writing, Listening and Speaking supplement)
- Ready! Set! Research! Marvin Terban. 2007. Scholastic Reference Guides

Assessments:
1. Final writing assignment (the essay itself)

Assessment Tools:
1. PWA 4-point holistic rubric
2. My self-made, student friendly rubric

Unit Plan and/or Lesson plans:
I have attached the lesson plan for each day of the unit. Each daily lesson plan is followed by any handouts or worksheets that we used on that particular day.

Student work:
I have attached student examples demonstrating each point in the 4-point holistic rubric. There are 2 student examples from each point, with the exception of examples that demonstrate a 4, in which there are four examples. I tried to select examples that show work using each of the different persuasive topic choices (there were three choices total).

Teacher Commentary and Reflection:
After teaching each day, I sat down and wrote a reflection about how the lesson went. I hope this will suffice to answer the reflection questions, and I think all questions are addressed in the following:
Day 1: This lesson went really well. It engaged students by having them first write persuasively about a topic that they are passionate about. It served as a reminder of the persuasive writing process and elements of persuasive writing.

Day 2: The Do Now is excellent and really shows how we “code-switch.” If I were to teach this writing workshop again, I would definitely modify/change the “Identify Your Audience” graphic organizer to minimize confusion.

Day 3: This lesson went well. It made students reflect on past experiences with researching and reminded them of different ways in which they can conduct research. It also brought to light the different ways to incorporate research into your writing. *I really wish we had a computer lab!*

Day 4: Day 3 and 4 could actually be combined or condensed into one day and students could actually do the research in the computer lab one day (if one is available).

Day 5: While I saw a lot of good writing and ideas getting put on paper, I feel that “spring fever” took over any sort of order for all students being engaged and on task for this lesson. I feel like the outline requires some explanation, and may not be able to be used as an independent assignment. That could be fixed though, possibly with a sheet that further explains how to complete the outline (and/or just don’t teach this unit in the Spring!)

Day 6: This was a good lesson because it gave students something constructive to do for themselves and each other. There is a lot of possibility for effective differentiation through strategic pairings.
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*Some days/lessons can be extended or combined depending on computer lab availability.*
Day 1
Introduction to Workshop

1. Do Now/Journal Entry: Write about something you want your parents to give you. Why do you want it? What do you need to do to get it from them? Why should they give it to you? What will you tell them to convince them to give it to you?

2. Introduce the Persuasive Writing Workshop: For the next two weeks, we will be working on a formal, persuasive writing essay. Pass out and have students complete the "How to be Persuasive " Worksheet, using the item they wrote about for their Do Now. This worksheet helps to remind them about the steps that go into persuasive writing. Collect the worksheet when they are finish to assess their level of persuasive writing and to ensure they used all elements (argument, counter argument, answer to counterargument). (Modification – Special Education students with writing difficulties do not need to write the entire paragraph, they can fill out the boxes on the front side).

3. Read page 598- 602 in HOLT textbook.

4. On the board, write down the topics that students have to choose from for their essay. Include that these topics have been chosen for their interest and relevance, as well as the fact that both sides of the issue are "researchable."

Topic Choices:
1. Make an argument about whether homework has educational benefits or no educational benefits
2. Make an argument about banning or not banning junk food in the school cafeteria
3. Make an argument for why ___ (Obama/Clinton/McCain) should be elected President in 2008

5. Pass out “Prewriting: Choose an issue/State your opinion” graphic organizer. Students will copy down the three topic choices under “issues” and write their opinion on each topic under “my point of view.” Then, students will write the opinion statement for the topic they will write their essay about (one of the three choices) on the “Opinion Statement” line at the bottom of the sheet.

6. Homework is to finish the “Prewriting” worksheet, esp. Opinion statement, if not finished in class.
How to be Persuasive...

Argument – Counter Argument – Answer to Counter Argument

When trying to persuade someone to see your point of view, you need to be ready to respond to how someone would argue against your opinion... in other words you need to have a come-back.

Here is an example:

Boy: Mom, I need a Play Station 3!  (ARGUMENT)

Mom: But you don’t need a Play Station 3. Playing with that will only distract you from doing your homework. (COUNTER-ARGUMENT)

Boy: OK, but if I am that excited to play with the Play Station 3, then you can use it as leverage when you want me to work harder. For example, when I am done with my homework, you can ask me to see it. If my homework doesn’t look carefully done, then you can take away my Play Station 3 until you feel that my work looks satisfactory. In this way, my grades will improve!! (ANSWER TO COUNTER-ARGUMENT)

Now, think about a request or an opinion that your parent or guardian might be likely to turn down, and fill in the chart below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Counter-Argument</th>
<th>Answer to Counter Argument</th>
</tr>
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</table>
Now use what you wrote in the chart to write a paragraph explaining your argument, the counter-argument, and your answer to the counter argument, proving the other person wrong. DON'T FORGET TO WRITE A STRONG TOPIC SENTENCE. Your topic sentence should include either the word "but" or "although."

For example: Although you think I don't need a Play Station 3, I have evidence to prove otherwise.

OR

You may think that I don't need a Play Station 3, but I can explain why I do.

Paragraph:
Prewriting: Choose an Issue/State Your Opinion

Directions: Use the graphic organizer below to help you choose an issue and write an opinion statement.

- Brainstorm several issues about which you have strong opinions, or quick-write, using the starter sentences below.

  If I were president, the first thing I’d change is _______________________.

  One thing that really bothers me about _______________________.

- List the issues along with your point of view on each. Choose the issue that is most important to you and will create strong feelings and opinions in others.

- Then, write your opinion statement in the space provided.

Issue:                      My point of view:

Issue:                      My point of view:

Issue:                      My point of view:

Opinion statement:
DAY 2: AUDIENCE

1. Do Now: Students will complete the “Change Your Voice” worksheet in their composition book.

2. Go over Do Now, having volunteers offer their entries. Discuss how each entry is different based on who you are talking to. Today we are going to learn about “audience” and discuss the audience for our persuasive essay.

3. Read pages 603-604 in textbook

4. Brainstorm possible audiences for each topic

5. Pass out “Identify your Audience” Graphic Organizer

6. Go over writing an Opinion Statement (This is the first question on the graphic organizer). Offer examples of possible opinion statements for each topic.

7. Complete the “Audience” worksheet in groups with the other people that are doing the same topic, and have the same opinion statement as you. This is due by the end of class. (These groups are great for differentiation, in that higher-level students will be able to support students that need help.)
HOW DOES YOUR VOICE CHANGE?

Please change your voice according to whom you are speaking to in the following situations. What does your audience want to hear? Think about your use of language and grammar. How do the sentences change? Write one or two sentences for each example:

1. You need to borrow money.
   
   A. Friend
   
   B. Parent/family member
   
   C. Your teacher or principal

2. You disagree with someone's opinion.
   
   A. Friend
   
   B. Parent/family member
   
   C. Your teacher or principal

3. You are feeling upset about something.
   
   A. Friend
   
   B. Parent/family member
   
   C. Your teacher or principal
Prewriting: Identify Your Audience

**DIRECTIONS** Use the graphic organizers on these pages to help you identify your audience and prepare for counterarguments they may have about your opinion statement.

- **What is my opinion statement?**

- **Who is interested in this issue?**
  - Group 1: ____________  
  - Group 2: ____________

- **For which group do I want to write?**

- **Why did I choose this group?**

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*Writing, Listening, and Speaking | Workshop 3: Persuasion*
How old are people in this group?

What else do I know about this group?

Who will be my specific audience?

What counterarguments might people in this group have?
Opinion Statements

Homework:
1. I think that homework has educational benefits.
2. I think that homework does not have educational benefits.

Junk Food:
1. I think that we should ban junk food in the cafeteria.
2. I think that we should not ban junk food in the cafeteria.

Election:
1. I think that Obama should be elected president in 2008.
2. I think that Clinton should be elected president in 2008.
3. I think that McCain should be elected president in 2008.

YOUR OPINION STATEMENT ONLY SAYS WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT A TOPIC, YOUR WHOLE ESSAY WILL TELL WHY.

Possible Audiences

- Homework: Teachers, Students, Parents, School District
- Junk Food: Students, Parents, Doctors, School Administration
- Election: Voters, supporters of the other candidates, students

THE AUDIENCE YOU WANT TO WRITE FOR IS THE GROUP THAT WILL DISAGREE WITH YOU!
DAY 3: RESEARCH

Do Now/Journal Entry: What does it mean to research? Have you ever had to research for an assignment? How did you do it? Was it easy or difficult?

Go over the Do Now and talk to students about their experiences with research.

Read page 604-606 in textbook
Take notes on “types of evidence” (see notes, attached)

Pass out “Survey” sheet, talk about surveys and interviews as a form of research. Help students write their “Survey Question” and explain how to use the form. Surveys are a quick and easy way to get some research done.

Read “Evaluating Websites” handout
Look at search engines for Internet research, such as Google, Yahoo and Wikipedia. If there is time, demonstrate how to look up information on one of the topics.
Notes:
Using Research in Persuasive Writing

◊ **Anecdote**: a brief story that illustrates a point (example: "My friend...")

◊ **Fact**: a statement that can be proven true

◊ **Statistic**: information in numeric form
  (example: 5 out of 10 students think homework helps them)

◊ **Example**: a specific instance or illustration of a general idea ("For example...")

◊ **Expert opinion**: a statement made by an authority on a subject

◊ **Interviews/Surveys**: Ask friends, experts or other people who are
interested in the issue about their opinion.
SAMPLE INTERVIEW SHEET

Name of person interviewed: ........................................

Date of interview: ...................................................

Place of interview: ..................................................

Question:

Answer:

Question:

Answer:

Question:

Answer:

Question:

Answer:

Fill in as many questions as you can think of before the interview. Leave blank spaces for questions you think up on the spot. For more about personal interviews, see chapter 8.

SAMPLE SURVEY FORM

SURVEY QUESTION:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice 1</th>
<th>Choice 2</th>
<th>Choice 3</th>
<th>Choice 4</th>
<th>Choice 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Number of people who selected that choice:

To record how many people selected each choice, make lines like this: |||| II, etc.

To learn more about how to conduct a survey, see chapter 8.
How To Evaluate a Website

1. What is the purpose of the website? (Why did the author write it?)
   - Reasons for making a website:
     - to give information
     - to teach you something
     - to give links to other places on the internet
     - to help you contact people
     - to sell you something
     - to entertain you!
   
Who is the website for? (ex: parents, children, teens, teachers...)
Is the website easy to understand?

2. Who wrote the information? (Who is the author? Do you know anything about the author?)
   
   It is important to know who wrote the information. Look for information and clues to decide if the author is really an expert. Can you trust the author?
   
   After you find the author, see if there is a way to contact him/her. Try asking other people (your teacher, a doctor, a friend) if they know the author.

3. Is the website useful for you?
   - Does it answer your questions?
   - Is it easy to read?

4. Can this website be checked?
   
   A website that tries to give correct information should always give information you can check. Maybe there is a list of books or magazines about the same subject. Maybe there are links to other websites with the same information.

   Always check:
   1. That the author is who they say they are.
   2. If anyone else says the same thing.
   3. If you have all the information.
5. When was the website written or **updated**?

Usually you can find the date at the bottom of the page. To update means to add new information. If the website is old, the information is probably old. Check to see when it was written or updated.

6. **Is the information biased?**

Often there is more than one way of looking at information. Writing information a certain way to make you see a certain perspective is called a bias. Information on the web can be biased. Look at the website and think about why the author wrote it. Do they want you to think a certain way or do they want you to make up your own mind? A site that is unbiased will give you a fair and balanced opinion.

7. **Does the website tell you about choices?**

Some websites give information. Other websites give advice. A good website will tell you about many options and choices available. If the website gives you advice it should also tell you what may happen if you follow the advice.

*NEVER FOLLOW ADVICE FROM THE INTERNET WITHOUT CHECKING IT WITH SOMEONE FIRST!!!*
DAY 4: RESEARCH CONTINUED

Do Now: Take out your Interview/Survey form from yesterday. Students will have the opportunity to survey their classmates about their topic.

Demonstrate how to use the survey information after it is collected. Show them this example on the board:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion Statement: Homework does not have educational benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey Question: Do you think that homework helps you in class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
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<td>----------</td>
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<tr>
<td># of people:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explain to Students that the “sample size” is 20 students surveyed. Ask them how they might use the information to support the Opinion Statement. They should see that about 8/20 students think homework helps and 12/20 don’t think it helps. Therefore, they could use the statistic in their paper that says something like “60% of the students I surveyed do not think that homework helps them in class.”

If they haven't done so already, allow students 5 minutes to survey each other.

After the surveying is completed, tell students that they will have today and tomorrow to continue researching for their topic. The lesson today will help them to focus on what they will be researching.

Read pg. 621 (bottom) – 633 (middle).
Pass out Graphic Organizer, “Prewriting: Purpose, Audience, Questions”

Working with people who share their opinion statement, complete the graphic organizer with research questions that they will use in researching their topic.

Tell students that these questions will help them to focus their research and will be due in two days, along with their research results. (When completed, research will be submitted in the form of survey results, printed web pages, photocopies of books and/or any notes taken based on resources.)

**For the most part, this lesson took the entire class period. As an extension assignment or alternate Do Now, another option is to use the “Evaluating Sources” sheet and read page 636 in the textbook. This is a great reminder to students about choosing resources that will most likely benefit them.
Prewriting: Purpose, Audience, Questions

**Directions**: Use the chart below to identify your audience and purpose.
- Answer the questions in the first section to identify your audience's needs.
- In the second section, list the information you already know about your topic and questions you still have about it. These questions are your research questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do my readers already know about my topic?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What do my readers need to know about my topic?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What can they do with the information?</td>
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</table>

**What do I already know about my topic?**

**Research Questions**

Who:

What:

Where:

When:

Why:

How:
Evaluating Sources

**DIRECTIONS** Below are ten descriptions of sources for a research paper on the effects of diabetes. Identify each description as either a preferred source or a less reliable source.

- If the source is preferred, write **P** in the space to the left of the number.
- If the source is less reliable, write **LR**.
- Explain your answer on the line provided.
- Number the preferred sources to show the order in which you would consult them.

1. an entry in a medical dictionary published in 1973

2. an article published this year in a medical journal

3. a recent magazine article titled “Dealing with Diabetes,” written by a doctor

4. a Web page prepared by the American Diabetes Association

5. an autobiography by a celebrity who has diabetes

6. a 1985 encyclopedia article on the causes of diabetes

7. an American Medical Association pamphlet called *Living with Diabetes* displayed in your doctor’s office

8. an online chat room discussion for people who have diabetes

9. an interview with a doctor, published in a national newspaper this year, about diabetes treatments

10. an interview, published in a national newspaper this year, with a woman whose grandmother died from undiagnosed diabetes
DAY 5: Outlining and Writing Rough Draft

Do Now: Take out your “Prewriting” sheet from yesterday and your completed research and put it on your desk. Collect the “prewriting sheet.”

Pass out one “student model” example of a persuasive essay and read through it together. Discuss the example and explain the different parts of the essay. It includes the opinion statement, reasons, and evidence/facts for each reason. It also includes a counterargument.

Tell students that we will be outlining and writing the rough draft for our persuasive essay today.

Pass out outline format. Go over the format and show students that each paragraph needs to include at least one fact/example, etc. Students should work on their outline while you go around and check that students have their research. For students who, for one reason or another, did not have their research, I put together a folder of research that I conducted for them to use during the class period.

When students have finished with their outlines, pass out the Persuasive Essay Rubric and go over it with students. It should look very familiar because it includes the same information that students should have added into their outlines.

Allow students the rest of the class period to begin writing their rough drafts. Offer a second “student model” example for them to use and refer to when writing. Tell students that following the formats of the examples will help them get a good grade.

By the end of the class period, students should have their outline finished and have a good start on their rough draft.

Homework: Finish writing rough draft.
Writing a Persuasive Essay

INTRODUCTION

Attention-grabbing opener

Earthlings, Unite!

What happened on April 22, 1970, to bring people all over the world together? That date marked the first celebration of Earth Day. Every year since then, people in record-breaking numbers have used April 22 to show their common concern for our environment.

Opinion statement

Our school needs to join the celebration by organizing a full schedule of Earth Day activities.

BODY

Reason #1

First of all, celebrating Earth Day would draw attention to important environmental problems on our planet. Toxic chemicals, hazardous wastes, and other pollutants are choking our air and water.

Evidence (fact)

Many of our fellow creatures on Earth, including some of the rarest animals and plants, may die out completely because they are losing their natural surroundings. Celebration of Earth Day would help to make us all more aware of environmental problems and how we might solve them.

Reason #2

Here is a second reason for our school to observe Earth Day:

Evidence (expert opinion)

The activities could unite students, parents, teachers, and community members. As Ms. Ryan, our science teacher, said, "Our society is very divided, but we all breathe the same air—air that is getting dirtier every day. Earth Day can bring us together." Students and adults could work together in teams to clean up trash, plant young trees, or learn more about recycling. Everyone would benefit from working together.

Counterargument

Reason #3 (response to counterargument)

Some people argue that this event would take away from valuable time in the classroom. Wrong! Earth Day would be a great way for students to learn about environmental issues. Not all students are motivated by what they learn in class. Some are motivated when they have the opportunity to apply their classroom skills. A friend of mine, for example, disliked her English class until she spent a day working for a local newspaper. The experience helped her understand...
why the skills she learns in class are important. An Earth Day
celebration could help students apply their classroom knowledge and
motivate them to learn more.

We can help to make a difference by celebrating Earth Day
at our school. So, Earthlings, unite! If you agree, write a letter to the
school board or the administration today. All of us take life from
Earth. Now let's give something back in return.
by David S. of Oak Bluffs Middle School
in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts

Hungry Students Can't Study

"Grrrr! Oh I'm hungry! when is lunch?" If you have ever walked down the junior high halls, this is something you will definitely hear. All kids should be able to have a snack time, or at least be allowed to keep food in their lockers.

When I asked why we couldn't have a snack time one teacher I asked just said, "Why? You're not little kids anymore." That is just the point; we need food because we are growing now more than we ever will in our lives. Being hungry can have a big effect on the performance of a student. We just can't work or concentrate when all we can hear is the rumbling of our stomachs. We count down the seconds till lunch.

Anecdote

I keep food in my locker, and I'll be the first to admit it. I keep it there for the days I just can't wait until lunch. It keeps me focused in class because I'm not worrying about being hungry. But why should I have to worry about a teacher
Reason #2

Evidence (example)

catching me taking food out of my locker? We should be able to keep food in there without question. Getting a snack time really wouldn’t change things all that much. All we need is about five minutes. Trust me, if we can cram blueberry muffins down our throats in a two-minute hall period, we can definitely do it in five. All we have to do is take off a minute from each class and we will have more than enough time to eat.

Counterargument addressed

Is the trash the problem? Is that why we’re not supposed to eat in the halls? Well, put a few trash cans in the hall, or let us eat our snack in the community room. There are so many ways to solve this problem.

Reason #3

Evidence (example)

No one can work on an empty stomach and be focused at the same time. Teachers certainly have figured that out. That is why they have a vending machine in the teachers’ room, and why you will find a box of crackers in almost every teacher’s desk. If we can’t keep food in our lockers, they shouldn’t keep food in their desks.

Evidence (comparision)

Some teachers even think we should have a snack time.
All I'm doing is comparing them to us to show that our rights are different from theirs just because of the age difference.

That is the point I'm trying to make. It's not that we just want a snack time; it's that we need a snack time to keep us focused in class and to keep us working harder.

The way I feel is that kids aren't looked upon as regular people the way we should be. We need a snack during the day just as much as everyone else. As I say, "Let us eat cake!"
I. Introduction
   1. Opinion Statement: ________________________________________________
   2. Brief sentence explaining why I believe my opinion statement:
      ________________________________________________

II. Paragraph 1
   1. Reason #1:

      2. Evidence/Fact/Example:

III. Paragraph 2
   1. Reason #2:

      2. Evidence/Fact/Example:

IV. Paragraph 3
   1. Counterargument:

      2. Evidence/Fact/Example to respond to counterargument:

V. Conclusion
   1. Restatement of opinion:

      2. Summary of Reasons:

*** When you write your rough draft, remember that PARAGRAPHS HAVE 4-5
   SENTENCES!***
**Persuasive Essay Rubric**

**Attach this rubric to your final draft. DO NOT WRITE ON IT!**

<table>
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<tr>
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**Final Draft Grade:** __________/25

(Multiply your score by 4 to get your total points and percent grade)
Day 6: SELF AND PEER EDITING

Do Now: Take out your rough draft

Today, you will be editing your own paper, and peer editing a classmate's paper.

Hand out editing forms.

First, explain the Self-editing form. Give students 10 minutes or so to self-edit their paper.

Then, have them turn the editing form over and explain the peer-editing side. They will give their rough draft and sheet to a peer (specify who, if necessary) and allow 10-15 minutes to read the other person's paper, make suggestions and ask questions.

If time allows, students can trade their papers one more time so that another set of eyes looks it over.

By the end of the class period, your paper should be edited by you and at least one other classmate. When you are finished, make the necessary changes and start working on your final draft.

Homework: Have an adult look over/edit your essay

***I gave my students a weekend to have an adult look over their paper, and then an extra day to get the final draft done. (Day 6 fell on a Friday, and the final draft of the paper was due on a Tuesday) This is the last day we are working on the essay in class.
### Revising: Persuasive Essay Self-edit

**Directions:** Use this chart to help you improve your persuasive essay.

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<th>QUESTIONS</th>
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<th>CHANGES YOU MADE</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Does the introduction have a clear opinion statement?</td>
<td>☐ Underline the opinion statement.</td>
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<td>2. Does the essay include at least two <em>P's</em> that logically support the opinion statement?</td>
<td>☐ With a colored marker, <strong>highlight</strong> the reasons that support the opinion statement.</td>
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<td>3. Does at least one piece of evidence support each reason?</td>
<td>☐ Circle the evidence.</td>
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<td>4. Does the essay address counterarguments?</td>
<td>☐ <strong>Put stars</strong> next to each counterargument.</td>
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<td>5. Are the reasons in an order that makes sense?</td>
<td>☐ <strong>Number</strong> in the margin the reasons in the essay.</td>
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<td>6. Does the conclusion include a restatement of the opinion and a summary of reasons?</td>
<td>☐ <strong>Put a check mark</strong> next to the restatement.</td>
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"Student friendly rubric" I used
Persuasive Essay Rubric to grade

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Final Draft Grade: ______ / 25

(Multiply your score by 4 to get your total points and percent grade)
Five Features in Persuasive Writing

- Clarity of Position: States a Position
- Organization and Development: Arrangement and Support of Position
- Audience Awareness: Response to Reader Questions and Counterarguments
- Language: Sentence Structure & Vocabulary
- Conventions: Spelling, Grammar, & Punctuation

4 - ADVANCED

- Writing presents a clear position throughout; presentation is entertaining, engaging or original
- Reasons for position are fully developed; arguments are well supported by organized appropriate examples, details and anecdotes
- Writing shows reader awareness through strategic and convincing support for position and thorough response to counterargument
- Language is persuasive, precise and lively; sentences are varied and vocabulary adds to the persuasiveness of the writing
- Writing shows clear control of writing conventions though there may be a few errors that are “first-draft” in nature

3 - PROFICIENT

- Writing states a position; presentation is straightforward
- Reasons, examples and/or anecdotes support and develop the position. Arguments are supported and organized; ideas are clear; opinions may be presented as facts
- Writing shows reader awareness through support for position and attempt at response to counterargument
- Language is clear; sentence types are varied; vocabulary is specific
- Writing shows control of writing conventions; errors do not interfere with meaning

2 - DEVELOPING

- Writing states position but presentation may be brief, vague, or confusing
- Reasons and examples insufficiently support the position. Development is incomplete; middle and/or conclusion may be abrupt or missing
- Writing may show reader awareness and may not acknowledge counterargument
- Language is simple; sentence types are mostly simple or the repetitive; vocabulary is general
- Errors may interfere with meaning.

1 - EMERGING

- Position is difficult to identify or absent; presentation may be brief, vague, or confusing
- Limited development of arguments; support is brief or incoherent
- Reader awareness is difficult to identify
- Language is general and vague; sentences may be incomplete or run-on
- Errors in conventions interfere with meaning or make writing difficult to understand

OT - Off Topic
NR - No Response
Student Work Samples

Ms. Wiseman
7th Grade
Should Junk Food Be Banned From School Cafeterias?

I think that junk food should be banned from school cafeterias. To prove my point, it has been proven that there is three times as much childhood obesity now than there was in 1980. There is more childhood obesity now than there ever was. This goes to prove my point.

One dependable reason why I believe in my opinion is that the National Center for Health Statistics agree with me. They say that 16% of kids and teens are overweight. They also say that 30% of all adults are overweight. This really helps support my opinion. You don't need to say this. You will show me in the rest of your essay.

One person who is a good source to support my opinion is Mark Zanger, a reporter from the Boston Phoenix. He writes that kids prefer simple sugar, starches and fatty foods their healthy counterparts. Part of this occurrence happens because these foods are served in school cafeterias. When no healthy foods are available for kids to choose, they can only choose the unhealthy ones. This is how they become addicted to junk foods. Great evidence!

Some might say that buying healthy foods will be costly and cut into teachers' budgets. Really think about this. What is really more important? Cutting the teacher's salaries back by 50 cents an hour or hundreds of fewer kids diagnosed with diabetes? If we don't make a change to healthier eating now, it'll never get done. It's the right thing to do for our schools.
I believe we should ban junk food from all school cafeterias. Kids are 16% overweight and they prefer junk food instead of healthy choices. Why should we just sit around and let America's future become unfit and unhealthy? It's our choice and we can make a difference.

Awesome job, Spencer!
Persuasive Essay: Junk Food

In 4th grade walked up through the cafeteria's line, with the sun beating down and the line long. As I entered I sat up the lunch pizza hut. They called it. Greased and cheese pushed into a small bundle with as little nutrition as possible. All of the kids in the school ate the same lunch. How can we allow about 50 kids to eat that every day? That's why I propose a junk food ban.

An obvious reason is that junk food is unhealthy. Everyone knows this so why haven't we changed anything? The number of our kids in the states has been doubled from 3 decades ago. The six fact that kids by this food at school is appalling! All we need to do is remove the junk food from schools. Just you wait, those obesity numbers will fall faster than a bird with lead.

Another is something you probably don’t know. The junk food companies probably make more money from the schools than anywhere else! 62% of middle schools have exclusive beverage deals! 63% of kids more than 50! How do we let kids, that we already face possibilities of obesity and diabetes, go to schools selling more junk food than the average supermarket? That's just insane! EXCELLENT!

Many people believe that the school needs the money from the junk food sales. In reality, however, all of the real money goes to the junk food companies. The effects on the school is short term. The studies in studies done, purchased more week after the switch. The junk food companies lost so much money that they came back with a new line of products that are supposedly healthy. If this success could be repeated elsewhere then this could be the biggest step forward since world war 2! Wouldn't that be cool?
So now do you agree with me that schools should ban junk food from schools? There are multitudes of diseases that are usually reserved for adults are now appearing in kids all over the USA! The schools sell way too much. The schools don't need the money from the sales. Anyway in 4 years there is a law that comes out banning junk food anyway so you don't even need to say anything. Really?
Barack Obama for President!

The United States needs a strong president who can bring new ideas to our nation. The candidates running for president are Hilary Clinton, Barack Obama and John McCain. I feel that Barack Obama should be elected in 2008 because he plans to give all citizens an opportunity, he has good strategies, and he can relate to the average citizen.

Barack Obama wants to give all children a great education. According to ElectionQuestions.com, Barack Obama wants to increase funding for Head Start so that families who cannot afford preschool will have the opportunity to go. He also will support innovative schools and recruit and reward worthy teachers. In addition, Obama will help parents pay for college fees. This shows that Obama will be helping schools and at the same time give a tax break to parents paying for college.

Polls show that majority of Americans agree with Barack Obama’s opinions about the war. For example, Ms. Wiseman prefers Obama to Clinton because in 2002 Clinton voted for the war, whereas Obama did not support the war from the beginning. Obama’s plan is to take the troops immediately out of Iraq. Clinton, on the other hand, wants to take the troops out within 60 days after the presidential election.

Some people argue that Hilary Clinton should become president in 2008 because she has more experience. Because Hilary Clinton spent 8 years in the White House she will not be able to recognize the changes that need to be made because she has been in Washington for so long and won’t be able to cast a “fresh eye” toward governing the
nation. I believe that Obama can bring new ideas to the White House and can understand our needs. Also, it might be hard for people to adjust to a woman president because our society has been patriarchal for so long regarding the presidency. I would like to see what changes could be made from an African American president that can relate to many disadvantaged and minority groups. Nice Work

I believe that Barack Obama can relate to all citizens and bring change to the United States. If Obama is elected he will take out the troops in Iraq which will allow U.S. citizens to pay for issues that matter, such as environmental issues and education. With this being his first time in Washington, he will bring fresh ideas and recognize important points. This is why you should vote for Barack Obama in 2008.

Theresa—This is by far the best essay on the Presidential issue. Good Work!
Persuasive Essay

There is a problem that has recently arisen in almost every elementary, middle, and high school across the country. It's the issue of the lunch selections that you can purchase in school cafeterias. Most schools sell junk food to students which I think is wrong. Junk food should be taken out of school lunch menus because they affect your body and mind in negative ways.

Junk food is the leading cause for childhood obesity. A single 12-ounce can of soda has as much as 13 teaspoons of sugar in the form of high-fructose corn syrup. Many of these sodas are available to kids at low prices plus many other completely unhealthy foods. We need to help work against obesity as much as possible because the statistics are already against our favor, over 32% of youths are overweight and nearly 74% are unfit. This is totally unacceptable and we need to do something about it. School lunches have a very high fat content and the USDA supplies schools with the same commodity foods as prisons. If we can stock vending machines and cafeterias with healthy food it would definitely make a dent in the childhood obesity rate.

Another reason we should start serving healthier food is because junk food doesn't give you energy to stay focused in school or the power to participate in sports. Lunch is right in the middle of the day, if you eat fatty or sugary foods it could cause you to get tired and not pay attention in your afternoon classes. Also, junk food zaps your energy which affects your physical activity. You can not perform to your best if you don't have any energy. Many people on my swim team used to snack on chips and soda before practice. When some of us complained about getting tired and not being able to make it through practice our coach asked us what we were eating beforehand. When he heard about our diet he told us that we shouldn't be consuming fried, fatty foods before we exercise. We should be eating healthy, natural foods because it would give us energy and it's good for our bodies.
Many people may argue that this is not a good idea. Students say that junk food just tastes better than healthy food. There is no rule that says healthy food can’t taste good. Many junk foods can be replaced by similar tasting, healthier substitutes. Instead of fried chips provide baked. Instead of soda offer carbonated fruit juice. If substitution doesn’t work then there’s always compromising. Have a healthy main portion for lunch and a small dessert; sweets aren’t bad as long as it’s in moderation. There are multiple ways to solve this problem we just have to enforce change.

Providing junk food in school cafeterias is just an all around bad idea. We need to have good food so we can reach our full potential. The food we eat affects our body and mind and we need to take advantage of that. Now that we know the problem we need to fix it.

Excellent essay, Chloe!
Homework, your teachers give you it all the time.
You say it is boring, hard and frustrates you. You would rather watch TV or play video games. I am here to differ: homework does have educational benefits. It helps you practice on that topic your learning. Homework is a big part of your grade and you can use it as a study tool.

A reason why homework has educational benefits is homework is review and gives you practice. You can get more practice on that subject and master that concept. If it is review, it should be easy because you already know how to do it. My evidence is 40% of the people I interviewed said homework is sometimes helpful, 5% it is always helpful, and 25% that homework is never helpful. (What did the other 30% say?)

Another reason is homework gives you a chance to finish on any work in class. If you didn’t finish a worksheet or problem in class, you can finish it at home. For homework and turn it in for points. You can finish up the notes at home by getting it on the teacher’s site or a friend. My evidence that I found on the Internet states, “Homework allows kids to catch up on work not finished in class.”

My “opponent” could be thinking homework is boring and takes up too much time of their time. They might say whoever made homework was “stupid.” It is a waste of time. When I was doing research, I saw a statement that said, “Kids would rather hang out with friends or watch TV than to do homework.” How would you respond to that?
Homework has educational benefits. It is review and gives you practice on work you need help on. Homework gives you a chance to catch up and finish work you couldn’t do in class. Most kids I interviewed says homework is helpful sometimes, others differ. Research tells me that homework lets kids catch up on any work.
Caleb Smith Period 1 Red 4/10/08 Persuasive Essay

The vote is 50 to 50. A bill will pass or fail based on your vote. The bill is about banning junk food from school cafeterias. How will you vote? The best decision is to ban junk food from school cafeterias.

Schools can make a big difference in their students’ health. In one credible study, \( \frac{1}{2} \) of the number of students that became overweight in the regular schools became overweight in the schools that advocated nutrition. The study also commented schools are good places to teach nutrition lessons. There also was a decline overall in overweight students in the schools that advocated nutrition.

Another problem is that too many students eat junk food for lunch. One survey found that 10/23 students have junk food for lunch sometimes or more often and 20/23 students have junk food occasionally or more often. I interviewed a teacher who has an open classroom during lunch and when I asked how many students eat junk food at her classroom she responded “... 5-15...” and when I asked how many eat junk food she replied “...3-4...”. I also found that on one school lunch menu 7/19 days had junk food for lunch such as corn dogs and hamburgers.

Another problem is too many kids are overweight. 1/6 of American kids are overweight. With more junk food and less athletic activities, the amount of overweight students will probably rise. Actually one California Assembly bill recognized that the amount of overweight kids is rising.

Some people think that overweight kids aren’t a big problem. Unfortunately, that is incorrect. One highly credible Yale group and AB 2686 claim “…bias and discrimination…obese children and adults...”. Also obesity leads to high blood pressure and heart disorders. With these related health disorders, obesity could cost the government millions.

We should ban junk food in our school cafeterias. It will make a difference in our children’s health by reducing the amount of kids that eat junk food for lunch. Too many kids are overweight and it’s a looming disaster. The vote’s 50-50. How will you vote?

This sentence should be revised.

Nice job!
Is homework good for you? I think homework isn't all that great. You might be asking why I think this, well let me tell you. Let's say you do the homework wrong, you will never know and you will keep making that mistake over and over again to where it becomes a habit and almost impossible to fix.

Here is my fist reason. Not everyone likes homework and think it is good for you. I have to agree with that, because to me it is true, but I can make you see that I am right. I took a survey 1/3 said homework is good for you, 1/3 said homework isn't good for you, and 1/3 said they don't know. So I took the 1/3 and cut it in half, in the end I ended up with 50, 50. (This is a fact.) What does this fact mean?

Here is my other reason. Homework doesn't help with everything. For Example: Let's say that you read a book on how to fly a kite. Now that sounds pretty simple, right? So, let's say that you go out and decide to fly a kite, you go out and start to throw it up in the sky and it falls right down. And you are wondering why it isn't working. Do you know why? Well I do because it takes practice to make perfect. It is that way with everything, Math, English, Science, and so on and so forth.
I asked a few people who like homework what they think of it. This is what they said. Homework is good for you and it helps you get smarter. And that is all they said and nothing else. My response was, so, you really don't know why homework is good for you, you just think it is. So, when I said that homework isn't good for you, I meant it! I meant it when I said homework doesn't help with everything, and if you do something wrong it will never get fixed. You should really ask yourself what is homework good for anyways?
Homework

I think that homework is beneficial. It's beneficial because it helps you to learn more. These are some reasons why I think it can help you:

Homework gives you more practice. It helps you to focus. It makes you more responsible because you have to turn it in the next day. It teaches you more vocabulary, and helps you on tests.

If you do your homework everyday, you could become smarter. If you do well in math, you could get a scholarship and go to a good college. You could play on a sports team and get really good, and they'll pay for you to go to college. But you have to get good grades. This means you have to do your homework.

A lot of kids don't want to do their homework because they're unmotivated. Maybe they'd rather be doing something else with their time. Like, watching TV, or playing sports, or hanging out with their friends.

So, I think that you could get a good benefit from doing homework. So far, you have learned that it gives you more practice, and makes you smarter. So the next time you think about not doing your homework, think about all the benefit.
We should have some junk food in the cafeteria

My friend got into a fight because he did not get the French fries in the school cafeteria that he was waiting for all day long.

Students like junk food more than healthy food. Junk food is for example chips and French fries and sodas and candy bars. I surveyed 14 students asking them if they got lunch in the cafeteria. 5 students said they never ate in cafeteria food. One student said he ate the cafeteria food once. There was one student who was eating the cafeteria sometimes and there were 7 students who ate the cafeteria food every day. I found out that more students eat the food in the cafeteria than bring their own lunch.

Students will eat some healthy food from the Cafeteria if they get one piece of junk food to go with it.

Students will be more happy and pay more attention in class and have less fights if they get one piece of junk food in the cafeteria. Then the students won't think so much about that one piece of chocolate or French fries.

Students will not grow fat off of one piece of junk food that comes with their cafeteria lunch.

If they don't like their lunch they will go and buy a lot of junk food after lunch. Or they will bring their own lunch with more junk food. The school will lose money by not selling so many lunches.

Students like junk food. If the cafeteria doesn't give it to them they will find it somewhere else.
Does homework help you at school? Do you think students love homework? Well, they finally have a say... I have interviewed forty different people and looked up websites about banning homework but I never heard any issue like this before.

First of all, people (or teachers) always say that homework will always help you at school and especially on the tests. On websites some schools are talking about banning homework and some already did.

Second, homework has cut into free time and family time. We spend exactly seven hours and thirty minutes at school and we have a break for thirty minutes then we sit back down in a cramped class.

Third, it causes kids to stress out. There books are getting heavier and bigger each year and they give more homework to students making it hard for students to do different activities.
Research Packets

The following are packets of research that I made available to students who did not or were unable to conduct their own research. It was very handy to have folders of this research available to hand to students so they couldn't say "I can't write my outline because I don't have any research." It also provided good additional research materials for students struggling with their own research.

While compiling this research, I tried to include information on both sides of the debate. I did not provide research on the presidential candidate debate, as I presented that essay choice as the "challenge" option.
Research Packet 1:

Homework
Should we abolish homework?

YES  If students are in school seven hours a day, what right do I have to interfere with their family time? One of my fellow teachers had a son in middle school who would come home from basketball practice, then go to the basement to do, on average, three hours of homework a night. Does this sound healthy?

At the younger grades, it is almost criminal to assign homework. I spoke to a mother of a first-grader who was getting 30 minutes a night. She is very frustrated that instead of quality time with her son, she has to go through homework that at times is frustrating for him.

In my own classroom, I have actually noticed an increase in achievement, thanks to my reduction in homework. I used to assign a big project at the end of a novel or unit, and then give students a week or so to do it on their own. Later, I tried giving students time in class to work on these projects. Two positive things happened as a result: a higher percentage of students turned in a project, and there was an increase in the quality of the projects.

Educators have about seven hours a day to create meaningful learning experiences. If they cannot, then they are not using time efficiently. Children are not machines. They need “down time” just like any adult.

MIKE BURMAN teaches high school English and journalism at Horace Mann High School in North Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

NO  Abolishing homework will negatively impact students’ learning in no small measure. First, it would be detrimental to continuity. Homework allows students to practice the skills they learned earlier in the day, so that when they return to school the next day, those skills aren’t lost. I don’t know of many students who willingly study the next chapter without being asked. There are exceptions, but most students do not study on their own. They need direction; homework is just one tool to keep them on track.

Also, when students have assignments that are to be completed at home, it often encourages parents to become more involved with their children’s education. When reviewing homework assignments, parents are able to see firsthand what their children are learning in school, which fosters communication between teachers and parents. This has been an invaluable tool in my classroom to foster the home/school relationship.

Teachers should not relent in using homework to enhance students’ performance, but it should not be assigned to the extent that students become inundated or overwhelmed, and it should never be assigned as punishment.

Although homework is an essential ingredient to a quality education, breaks from homework can certainly be given from time to time—students sometimes need breaks just as we need breaks from our work.

HENRY ADEOYE is a special education teacher at Moorhead Junior High School in Conroe, Texas.

EDUCATORS FORUM
Who was your favorite teacher when you were in school? If your students knew you when you were their age, what would most surprise them? Share your thoughts on our Forums page—www.nas.org/forum—or e-mail your story to cline@nas.org.

OTHER VOICES

Here’s what other educators are saying on our message boards. Join the debate by visiting www.nas.org/forum.

CLASSROOM TIME  I am a middle school teacher in Ohio.

I HAVE TAUGHT for 13 years and have not given homework for that time. I assign voluntary homework for test preparation, last-minute assignments, and for enrichment. If students are not ready to grade, they should not be graded. I give continuous feedback to students, and have never felt that homework was the only way to teach. Students who do not complete their homework are not allowed to miss class; it is not possible to know who did the homework. The assignment is a part of the grade until it is completed. The assignment is an opportunity for students to get help and feedback.

JIM LUDWIG, Jr. High Central School, Cleveland, Tennessee

THE STUDENTS PLANNING to begin their working careers right after high school are less likely to be involved in programs that will require much of the day of the workday. They plan to be on their own, but the self-discipline is needed to develop study habits. Payoff for dedication. A strong work ethic. Homework translates to a strong work ethic in the workplace.

THOMAS BARBEAU, Manatee High School, Manatee, Wisconsin
Research Q&A: Homework

Does homework help students do better in school?
If the research about homework is inconclusive, why do teachers continue to assign it?
Are students today overburdened with homework?
How much time should my child spend on homework each night?
What is the purpose of homework?
What kind of homework is most beneficial to students?
Why does my child spend two or more hours every night on homework that is time-consuming but not interesting or challenging?
Would it help my child to attend an after-school program that provides homework help?
Does homework help close the achievement gap between students from low-income families and their more advantaged peers?
Should students with learning disabilities do homework?
What kinds of homework policies should school districts establish?
What questions about homework has the research not yet addressed?

Does homework help students do better in school?
The research on this question is very mixed. Some studies show that homework is linked to better test scores and grades in school, while other studies show no links, and still others suggest a negative influence of homework.
Homework does seem to improve achievement and grades for older students more than younger students. In fact, some studies suggest that homework may be detrimental to younger students.

If the research about homework is inconclusive, why do teachers continue to assign it?
Many parents, educators, and policymakers continue to support homework. There is a widespread belief that homework builds character, work habits, and academic skills. The focus on international competitiveness contributes to the idea that U.S. students should be working harder. There are also fears that without homework, children will spend their after-school time in unproductive ways, such as watching television, instant-messaging, or playing video games.
Are students today overburdened with homework?
In spite of recent media reports that U.S. students are overburdened with homework, the average amount of homework across all grade levels is less than an hour per night. This is only an average, of course. Students in some programs—such as advanced courses—may have much more homework than this and others may have less.

How much time should my child spend on homework each night?
Little is known about the "optimum" amount of time students should spend on homework. The available research indicates that the optimum amount of time for high school students is 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 hours per night; for middle school students, the optimum appears to be less than 1 hour per night. When students spend more time than that on homework, the positive connection with student achievement diminishes. There is less research on elementary students, but what is available suggests that smaller amounts of homework may help to develop work habits and study skills but do not directly affect student achievement.

What is the purpose of homework?
Homework can be assigned for instructional and noninstructional purposes. Instructional homework may be assigned to help students (1) practice what they did in class that day; (2) prepare for new material; (3) extend what they have learned by applying the information in new contexts; or (4) integrate separately learned skills by applying them on projects. Most homework assigned by teachers is for practice and preparation purposes. Noninstructional homework may be assigned to (1) help students develop time-management and work skills, (2) improve communication between parents and children, (3) encourage students to work with their peers, or (4) fulfill school or district homework requirements. Noninstructional purposes for homework are more common for younger students than older students.

What kind of homework is most beneficial to students?
There is not much research on this topic. Some studies have shown that homework that prepares students for new material or asks them to review or practice old material leads to higher test scores than homework that simply reviews what was covered in class that day. One study of science homework found that students were more likely to return homework that required them to interact with their parents. Also, students who were assigned this kind of homework received better science grades than students who were assigned homework to complete on their own.

Why does my child spend two or more hours every night on homework that is time-consuming but not interesting or challenging?
On average, children spend less than an hour per night on homework. If your child is regularly doing homework for two hours or more each night, there could be a number of reasons. Some schools and districts have policies that require
teachers to assign a certain amount of homework. Some children spend more time on homework because they are less efficient or lack skills they need to complete assignments. Older students—especially those in advanced classes—are most likely to be assigned relatively large amounts of homework.

Would it help my child to attend an after-school program that provides homework help?
After-school programs that offer homework help have not been shown to consistently improve student achievement. Such programs can, however, help improve students' motivation, self-confidence, and work habits, which may indirectly improve performance in school.

Does homework help close the achievement gap between students from low-income families and their more advantaged peers?
There is not much research evidence to support this notion, partly because the research on the benefits to homework for any student is so inconclusive. Some researchers believe that homework may actually increase the "achievement gap" between children from advantaged backgrounds and those from less advantaged backgrounds. This is because children from advantaged backgrounds have more resources (such as computers with Internet access) and tend to have better-educated parents who can help them complete assignments. Even when homework help is provided at school, there is not much evidence that it brings about higher achievement—although it may improve student work habits and motivation. More research is needed on this question.

Should students with learning disabilities do homework?
Homework can help students with learning disabilities if they get help with organizing and completing the work.

What kinds of homework policies should school districts establish?
At present, the research findings on homework are so inconclusive that school districts should probably not set specific policies on homework. More appropriate might be homework guidelines at the school level that are created with input from all stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

What questions about homework has the research not yet addressed?

- Parents and school board members may have more specific questions about homework that the research has not yet addressed adequately or in detail. Such questions include the following:
- Are certain types of homework beneficial for learning certain types of skills?
- Are there certain types of homework that provide no measurable benefit?
- Is the effect of homework different in different subject areas? For instance, does math homework show
a stronger link to improved student learning than language arts homework?

- Do students at different performance levels experience different benefits from homework: that is, do advanced/grade-level/remedial students experience greater benefits?
- Do students at different socioeconomic levels or from various racial/ethnic groups experience different benefits from homework? Some research has been done on this question, but more is needed—especially in regard to school districts' efforts to close the achievement gap.

The homework review was produced by researchers at Edvantia for the Center for Public Education. Edvantia, formerly the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, is an education research and development not-for-profit corporation founded in 1966.

Posted: February 5, 2007

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Homework does benefit children

The debate over whether schools should set homework has resurfaced with the imminent publication of a book by the American academic Alfie Kohn, which suggests that homework turns children off education and provokes family rows. He suggests there should be none. "Kids should have the chance to relax after a full day at school," he argues. It is nearly nine years since the Department for Education and Skills - then under David Blunkett - produced its first ever guidelines on homework for schools.

It is a good time to take stock. The DfES recommended 20 minutes per day for four and five-year-olds (10 minutes of parents reading to them and 10 minutes reading on their own or practising sums) and up to two hours for young people taking GCSEs. These guidelines have increased the amount of homework from a level where only 5 per cent of schools set maths homework for nine and 10-year-olds three days a week (compared with more than 80 per cent in most other Western countries). However, the level set by the guidelines still falls way below the amount of homework done before the Second World War when 11-year-olds were spending up to 12 hours a week swotting at home.

A little homework can improve academic performance, but too much can switch a child off from learning. So the Blunkett advice has it about right and Kohn's exhortations for an end to all homework should be resisted. We have witnessed an improvement in literacy and numeracy since 1998 - although there is no proof the rise is connected with homework. Premier League out-of-school clubs for slow learners have, however, improved standards, according to the National Foundation for Educational Research. And the debate over Kohn's book is unlikely to end the story. Experts have disagreed over homework since state education began in 1870.

After "payment by results" was first introduced for teachers in 1883, time spent on homework rose sharply - until an educational journal asked in 1929, "is homework really necessary?". By 1985 school inspectors had moved to restrict homework set for the under 12s until the 1998 guidelines revived the issue again.

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Homework a homewrecker: Report

First national study on workload concludes it's burning out families and is of little value to elementary schoolkids

February 09, 2008

KRISTIN RUSHOWY
EDUCATION REPORTER

Homework is of little benefit to students from junior kindergarten to Grade 6, say the authors of a just-released Canadian study, who also found it is often the source of stress and burnout in children, as well the cause of conflict – even marital stress – for many families.

In the first-ever look at the homework load in this country, the study by two Toronto professors found homework rates vary wildly from student to student, and from grade to grade, with some Grade 2 students spending less than 10 minutes a night, while others log more than 45 minutes.

On average, Ontario students spend almost 40 minutes on homework a night, compared to 32.6 minutes in other provinces, which, statistically, is significantly more, say the authors.

While research shows some benefits to homework in grades 7 and 8 and high school, there's scant evidence that it improves student achievement in the younger years, say professors Linda Cameron and Lee Bartel of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto.

"For elementary school, especially for the primary grades, I am down on homework entirely," said Cameron, a former kindergarten teacher.

Parent Mary-Margaret McMahon, a mother of two children at Gledhill Junior Public School in Toronto, believes children need more unstructured time.

"I think the work should be completed in the classroom and then kids should be allowed to play," she said. "I think there's not enough

PARENTS SPEAK OUT

Some of the more than 1,000 parents who took part in a just-released study out of the University of Toronto had this to say about their children's homework and how it affects family life:

Homework expectations
"It comes home without them knowing what to do. Some of it hasn't even been taught yet! Very aggravating."

Reduces family time
"Our family finds all of
of that any more.

"I personally don't recall having homework prior to high school," apart from projects in grades 6 and 8, she added.

"We were out every night playing with our friends in the street."

Both of her children have had homework since junior kindergarten - when they brought home books to read several times a week. Her daughter, in Grade 3, does about half an hour of homework a night and her older son, in Grade 4, about an hour.

"I'm a big advocate of reading," she said, adding part of her son’s daily homework routine is to read French books for 20 minutes, which he does sitting by the stove with a timer set.

In fact, studies have shown that reading with, or to, children every day is the only conclusive way to boost their academic success, and Cameron believes that should be the only "homework" for younger children.

She and Bartel released their report to a group of about 55 teachers, parents and principals who gathered Tuesday night at a Scarborough elementary school to discuss reforming the Toronto District School Board's homework policy. The board voted to look into the issue after complaints from parents who had said that too much time was being spent on homework.

"There is a growing body of research in the U.S. that has found homework isn’t all it's cracked up to be, and a growing number of parents who say because of homework and other demands, children have no downtime; one writer has even gone so far as to say today’s children have a "nature deficit disorder." Some American elementary schools have cut back or entirely banned homework.

Cameron and Bartel embarked on this study because of the lack of comparative Canadian data.

In their study, more than 1,000 parents were surveyed and said while they like the good work habits homework promotes, as well as how it helps parents be involved in their children's academic lives, the amount students are getting is interfering with family time, play time, causing stress and even marital troubles.

"Kids are at school for six and a half hours ... and some are on buses at 7:30 in the morning and get home from school at 4:30 or 5 o'clock. That's a very long day, and then they are supposed to do homework," said Bartel in an interview.

"What do we expect of unionized workers, with hours and breaks, and what do we expect of our children? Schooling is their work."

Generally, students should spend 10 minutes per night per grade on homework. Toronto public school board guidelines recommend 10 to 30 minutes for junior kindergarten to Grade 3; 30 to 60 minutes from grades 4 to 6; 45 to 90 from grades 7 to 9; and up to 120 minutes for older high school students.

Karen Grose, the Toronto board's superintendent of programs, told
those at Tuesday's meeting that in some cases, the guidelines are being used as "a floor, not a ceiling." But she also noted that time requirements can be tricky, as one assignment may take a child 10 minutes to complete, while a struggling student could take much longer.

Board staff are to present trustees with a report in April or May about possible homework reforms.

Parent Frank Bruni, one of the driving forces behind the review, has said he believes children are too busy with homework, they have little family time or time to exercise and keep fit. He'd like to see no homework on weekends or during holiday breaks.

Trustee Josh Matlow believes the process will lead to profound changes in the way homework is dealt with in Toronto schools.

A recent survey of Toronto public board students found that those in grades 7 and 8 reported 10 hours of homework per week, and those in grades 9 to 12 were doing 12 hours per week. Many of those students also took part in music or sports, as well as holding down a part-time job.

Aurelija Jusyte, in Grade 12 at Humberside Collegiate, said high school students always complain about homework.

"They understand that assignments are building their skills, but it's the busy work that doesn't get anything done" that's frustrating, said Jusyte, who is one of two student trustees on the Toronto District School Board. Personally, she enjoys homework.

Gerald Mak, the board's second student trustee, said he'd like to see some consistency.

"Students usually tell me some teachers assign more homework than others - that's the issue," he said.

The Canadian homework study, which focused on Ontario, found that almost 20 per cent of students in the same grade as Jusyte spend more than two hours on homework a night. Cameron said that any longer than that and students' brains are "maxed out."

The study also found:

- Not only does homework cut into family time, it becomes a primary source of arguments, power struggles and is disruptive to building a strong family, including putting strain on marriages. Bruni said it even negatively affects family holidays.
- A large number of children in kindergarten are assigned homework, most of it "drill and practice."
- 28 per cent of Grade 1 students and more than 50 per cent of Grade 2 students spend more than 20 minutes on homework daily.
- While there's no real difference in the attitude of children toward homework, Ontario parents definitely feel more negative about it than others across the country.
- More than three-quarters of parents with children in Grade 4 and under help their children with homework. But, by Grade 4, only half of parents feel they are competent enough to do so.
- Parents are unsure about the benefits of homework; by Grade 5, just 20 per cent of parents feel it has a "positive effect on achievement."
- Half of children in junior kindergarten are enthusiastic about homework; by Grade 6, it

youngsters should be spent enriching their lives with music, sports, dance, play, which has much more positive long-term effects than mindless worksheets."

**Project work**

"The amount of input required by parents, not just the supervision, but actual leg work, hunting down resources and buying supplies, that is required is too much and doesn't reflect what the child could accomplish on his own."

**Positive home/school connection**

"I don't mind helping my children with homework. It is a way to really know what they are learning and are capable of."

**Promotes good work habits**

"For both my children, it has been a very positive experience, as it teaches time management, prioritizing, and the work is always worth doing."
drops to just 6 per cent and by Grade 12, just 4 per cent.

The researchers also came across several themes from parent comments – that homework is too difficult or the assignment unclear, that it cuts into family time and causes stress at home and that children are left with little time to play.

Bartel and Cameron also say homework is a social justice issue.

"Those of us who are educated, who've come through the system, have resources and aren't working three jobs" have the time, and ability, to help kids with homework, said Cameron. And if middle-class parents are too busy to help, they simply hire tutors.

Homework has been a hot topic since the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan began peppering his speeches with talk of back-to-basics, more rigorous schooling as the way to economic prosperity, said Bartel. In Ontario, the Conservative government under Mike Harris in the 1990s followed suit, implementing a tougher curriculum, eliminating the OAC (Grade 13) year, and bringing in standardized testing.

"Ontario has still not quite recovered from when we lost the OAC year," said Bartel. "The curriculum can't be shrunk. (The thinking is) you have to do it in a year less, so you have to push the kids harder, rather than rethinking the overall structure and design that comes with it."

He said if there's simply too much work to cover that teachers are sending home in order to get it done, maybe the school day or the school year should be longer.

It's not that teachers are to blame, said Cameron. They often feel pressure from parents to give homework. "Teachers feel it is a huge problem, too," she added. "Everybody is concerned about this issue."

Alfred Abouchar, founder and headmaster of La Citadelle bilingual private school in Toronto, has declared Wednesday "homework free" day– however, students are assigned review work to complete during the summer months.

"Homework has to be dosed properly," he said, adding the real benefit of homework is establishing routine, independence and discipline in students.

Abouchar doesn't believe homework should cover material that hasn't been discussed in class, nor should it be onerous.

"For me, learning has to happen 90 to 95 per cent in school," he said, "They should not be doing homework they didn't see in school."

Binna He's 4-year-old daughter attends a private religious school in Toronto and she gets weekly homework assignments. Whether it's learning letter or numbers or counting, she usually finishes it during the week, or on a Saturday morning. Her parents also read to her every night before bed.

But He said her daughter doesn't enjoy the schoolwork. "To be honest," she said, "she prefers to play."
Research Packet 2:

Junk Food
Health movement has school cafeterias in a food fight

By Nanci Heilmich, USA TODAY

Elizabeth Nyikako, 16, a senior at Whitney Young High School in Chicago, used to buy a Coke or a Twix candy bar from school vending machines, but not more. Now she gets bottled water and granola bars.

Cassie Willis, 16, drinks a soda from a vending machine in Baton Rouge, La.

Shone Talbert, 16, a junior at Hirsch Metro High School in the city, liked to get Butterfingers, potato chips and soft drinks from the machines. But now he buys them on his way to school. (Related story: Many groups cook up solutions)

That's because last year Chicago Public Schools revamped what was offered in the machines. Soft drinks were booted out, and water, sports drinks and juice were offered instead. Granola bars and baked chips replaced candy bars and fried chips.

Food for thought is taking on a new meaning as students across the nation begin a new school year. Chicago is just one of many school districts that have mobilized to replace high-fat, high-sugar foods and drinks with healthier choices in vending machines and cafeteria à la carte lines. Students returning to schools in cities such as Washington will see good-for-you foods in vending machines for the first time this fall.

This year alone, 42 state legislatures have enacted or proposed measures that require or recommend nutritional guidance for schools, says Carla Plaza of Health Policy Tracking Service, which reports on state health legislation. Some set limits for elementary and middle schools but give high schools more choices. Others propose standards that would apply to all grades.

"This has been a watershed year for state legislation dealing with school nutrition," says Amy Winterfeld, a health policy analyst for the National Conference of State Legislatures. "There has been a wide range of legislation covering everything from offering healthier beverages to eliminating deep-fat frying."

Why the nationwide drive to get junk foods out of schools? Because you can't pick up a newspaper or magazine without reading about childhood obesity. About 31% of children ages 6 to 19 are overweight or at risk of becoming so, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The supposed beneficiaries of this nutritional reform appear to have mixed feelings. "I saw the purpose of it — to make sure kids were eating healthier food at school," Nyikako says. "But on the other hand, I felt like people should be able to make choices without over-indulging. One candy bar a month isn't going to kill you."

Talbert hates the switch. "What they have to offer now, none of us want," he says. "It's OK to be healthy every now and then, but it shouldn't be forced on us."

But the other side is organized — and adamant. Many parents, public health advocates, school administrators, food service directors and legislators think it's crucial that schools offer healthy fare.

Even some industry groups are joining the effort. Last week, the American Beverage Association recommended that beverage companies adopt voluntary restrictions on the sales of soft drinks in school vending machines. The group recommends eliminating soft drinks in elementary schools, severely restricting them in middle schools and requiring that they be only 50% of the choices in high school machines.

Junk food 'free-for-alls'

Some schools are junk food "free-for-alls," says Elda Hohn, director of the nutrition services division for Vista Unified School District in San Diego County. Hohn revamped her district's vending machines five years ago to offer healthier fare. The district replaced chips, candy and sodas with granola bars, dried fruit, beef jerky, nuts, cut-up fruit, shaker salads, vegetables with ranch dressing, tuna packs with crackers, water bottles, milk and fruit juice.

Hohn visits other school districts nationally to discuss nutritional changes. In many, students can get candy or soft
drinks from the vending machines and buy doughnuts, sodas, chips and cookies from school stores, Hohn says. Plus, school fundraising groups hawk everything from cookie dough to gargantuan candy bars, she says.

The traditional school lunch programs need to operate on a level playing field, Hohn says. "If I'm selling healthy stuff in the lunch line, and the kids can walk 10 feet and buy three fresh-baked cookies for a buck from the school store, that's where they will spend their money," she says. "It's ridiculous."

In fact, the rules governing school foods are fairly complex.

Traditional school breakfast and lunch programs are regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The foods in vending machines and school stores — sometimes called "competitive foods" because they compete with the meal programs — are not regulated by the agency.

Because the USDA's guidelines for foods of minimal nutritional value in school à la carte lines haven't been updated for years, it's possible to get some vitamin-impaired fare there. Cafeterias can sell candy bars, cookies, ice cream and french fries but not Popscicles, lollipops and breath mints.

A recent survey supports what Hohn has observed about the abundance of "junk" food. A Pennsylvania State University study of 228 school-food service directors in that state showed that high-schoolers are surrounded by high-fat, high-sugar foods, and not just in vending machines.

The survey found that hamburgers, pizza and sandwiches are top sellers in à la carte lines. Next are high-fat baked goods, french fries and salty snacks.

"We need schools to stand on the side of parents who want to teach good nutrition, not on the side of junk-food companies who want to teach bad nutrition," says Gary Ruskin of Commercial Alert, a non-profit, anti-commercialism group.

But some industry groups argue that the sale of commercial foods at school is not the problem.

"Limiting access to certain foods for a few hours a day, half the days of the year, won't get you anywhere near to solving the childhood obesity crisis," says Steve Arthur, vice president of government affairs for the Grocery Manufacturers Association, a trade group.

He believes schools could have a bigger effect on health by improving nutritional and physical education. Plus, he says, if the foods and drinks aren't sold in vending machines or à la carte lines, kids will bring them from home.

Dan Mindus, a senior analyst with the Center for Consumer Freedom, a Washington, D.C.-based group supported by the restaurant and food industry, says, "The best thing schools can do about childhood obesity is to get kids moving in gym class."

Some school administrators say they need the income from vending machines — which can range from thousands to millions of dollars a year depending on the size of the school district — to finance activities such as sports, clubs, field trips, and music and art programs.

Money's on the table, too

The bottom-line question is: Will students eat the healthier snack foods and beverages so the schools continue to make money?

• Since Philadelphia schools instituted a no-soda policy in July 2004, the effect on sales revenue has been negligible, says Vincent Thompson, district spokesman. "It has been our experience so far that when kids get thirsty, they will buy whatever is in the machine."

• Miami-Dade County Public Schools restocked its high school beverage machines last year. Now a third of the machines have 1% low-fat milk; a third offer water and a 100% juice; and a third have soft drinks, says Penny Parnham, administrative director of the department of food and nutrition. Water is a huge seller, she says. Revenue from the beverage and snack machines with healthier snacks increased by $400,000 last year, she says.

• So far, the changes have taken a toll on revenue for Chicago Public Schools, although the exact amount is unknown, says Sue Susanne, who is in charge of food services. "We're losing revenue because kids don't buy juice, water and sports drinks with the same enthusiasm that they buy carbonated soft drinks." But, she adds, "From a health standpoint, this is absolutely the way we have to go."

• At Vista Unified district, Hohn says, "Kids will eat healthier items and you can still make money, and a box on anybody who says kids are only going to drink soda and eat Flaming Hot Cheetos. In 10 years I believe we will look back and say, 'Can you believe we used to sell that junk to our students?'"

• REPRINTS & PERMISSIONS
Oakland Unified School District
Community Advisory

OUSD Suspends Service of Beef at All School Sites
Decision comes in response to Westland Meat Co. Controversy

Oakland – Feb 1, 2008 – The Oakland Unified School District has suspended the service of beef at all schools sites in response to the controversy surrounding Westland Meat Company, a major meat supplier to schools throughout the United States. While it is not clear if OUSD vendors purchase Westland beef, the District is taking extra precautions in order to ensure the safety of students and staff and to protect the quality of its food supply.

“Given the recent reports of unsavory practices at Westland Meat, we feel it is necessary to eliminate beef products from the menu at all OUSD sites until we have confirmed that there is absolutely no threat to our students and staff,” explained Jennifer LeBarre, OUSD’s Acting Director for Nutrition Services. “We are currently working with our vendors to determine whether they have purchased any Westland products. Until clarification has been achieved on this question, we will not serve beef of any kind.”

LeBarre’s decision mirrored that of State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell, who placed an administrative hold on all Westland Meat products amid charges of animal abuse at the company’s facility in Chino, Calif. O’Connell’s decision was made in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. On Thursday, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer said he was “deeply concerned about the allegations made regarding inhumane handling of non-ambulatory disabled cattle in a federally inspected slaughter establishment … While we are conducting our investigation, today, USDA has indefinitely suspended Westland Meat Company as a supplier to Federal food and nutrition programs.”

Every student. Every classroom. Every day.
'Junk food-free' school fights obesity

Candy bars are confiscated; parents learn to cook

The Associated Press
updated 4:32 p.m. PT, Wed., April 28, 2004

NEW HAVEN, Conn. - At Nathan Hale School, candy bars are confiscated. Bake sales are frowned upon. The vending machines don't carry soda — only water, milk, or juice.

This is a "junk food-free school," an early phase of a districtwide initiative to fight childhood obesity. It's where third-graders have salads if they don't like the main course, and where seventh-grade girls take Pilates after school.

Nationwide, many schools are reconsidering their vending machine offerings and changing their lunchroom food lineup. But New Haven, an urban district on Connecticut's shoreline, is particularly committed.

"There isn't a candy bar in this school," says principal Kim Johnsky as she surveys the maze of lunch tables.

Nathan Hale, a K-8 school, is the first to go completely junk-free. Next fall, all schools will get a touch of the healthy treatment as the program expands.

Aggressive measures
Vending machine choices will be overhauled: baked chips will replace fried, granola will replace cookies. Cafeterias in elementary and middle schools have already rolled out baked versions of things like chicken nuggets and french fries, and fried foods will be gradually phased out of high schools, too.

The program doesn't stop in the cafeteria.

The district has started cooking classes for parents and infuses regular science classes with nutrition lessons. Building renovations include designs for larger gyms to encourage physical activity.

Even the bake sale, a traditional source of fund-raising for classes and parent organizations, is being discouraged in favor of plant sales and penny drives.

District Superintendent Reginald Mayo vows to lose 30 pounds by doing the same things he's trying to teach his students. (Up 2 pounds after three weeks on a diet, he admitted he wasn't off to a great start, though).

"I'm going to look pretty hypocritical if I'm talking about healthy eating to kids and parents, and I'm walking around at 217 pounds," he said.

In New Haven, an urban district on Connecticut's shoreline, the poverty rate is so high the system has a universal free lunch program. The district doesn't have hard data on how many students are obese, but officials say a significant number of its 20,400 students have diabetes.

Nationally, about 15 percent of children and adolescents between the ages 6 and 19 are obese, according to government figures.

Healthy budgets or healthy eating?
Dr. Stephen Updegrove, a medical adviser for New Haven Schools and one of the primary architects of the district's policy, said one goal is to create a "ripple effect" from the school to community.

But the program has met some resistance, particularly among school officials who fear that the program will trade healthy budgets for healthy eating.

The junk food- and soda-stocked vending machines pull in up to $10,000 in extra income for some of the high schools each year, and some schools fear income won't be as high with healthier snack options.

"That's considerable, considerable dollars," said Mayo, who is looking for ways to make up the lost revenue.
Schools across the country have made similar moves. Next year, six schools in other Connecticut cities will test a junk food-free vending project with the help of a federal grant.

"We can't guarantee they won't lose money," said Susan Fiore, a nutrition specialist with the state Department of Education. "But maybe the payoff is worth it. There's a lot of research out there that kids who eat better learn better, and that's a pretty easy sell."

A separate program will work with 10 local school systems to create nutrition policies. For example, teachers start rewarding students with something other than candy, and birthday parties might mean extra recess instead of cupcakes, Fiore said.

"It's slow," she said. "There's a lot of ingrained things that take time to change. You talk about not having cupcakes at birthday parties, and people freak out."

**Results uncertain**

Schools that develop nutrition programs, however, are in uncharted territory. There is little research on their effectiveness.

Dr. David McCarron, president of Portland, Ore.-based Academic Network and a specialist in childhood obesity, has been conducting a survey of school programs across the nation.

"There's a desire in the school districts that are trying to do the right thing," he said. "The problem is, I don't think we have a handle on what the right thing is. Very few of these efforts have ever had measured outcomes, so we don't know if these things are going to make a difference."

New Haven officials say their program has already created some results. In the parents' cooking class, some of the participants have started to lose weight, said Jene Flores, a family educator in the district.

Meanwhile, in the cafeteria at Nathan Hale, the new lunches are getting mixed reviews.

Angela Cable, a 9-year-old with glasses and a long brown ponytail, is just fine with the salad option.

"I'm not a vegetarian, but I don't eat a lot of meat," she explained.

Stephanie Aurora, a seventh-grader with blue-and-white manicured fingernails, is more blunt. She wants soda, and doesn't like the tuna fish that is on her salad.

The new food choices aren't her favorite, "but they're OK," she says.

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Md. School Cafeterias In a Bind Over Junk Food

By Amit R. Paley
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, April 5, 2005; Page B01

Annie Emberland bounded into the blue-and-white cafeteria at Calvert County's Huntingtown High School and immediately reached for a pack of three chocolate chip cookies.

"This is the best thing here!" said Emberland, 16, her back to a tray of quartered apples and golden corn. "We'd be really upset if they stopped serving them."

So would Linda Burns, 48, the cafeteria manager. She said she relies on profits from junk food -- from cookies and snack cakes to barbecue chicken wings and french fries -- to balance her budget.

"I hate to admit it, but we need to sell the junk food in order to make a profit," she said.

In the face of opposition from students who enjoy junk food and school systems hooked on the revenue it brings in, health advocates are supporting legislation in the Maryland General Assembly that would tighten nutrition standards on school food. Twenty-six other states are considering similar measures, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The proposed fat and sugar caps concern some food service managers and administrators who say they pose a risk to their schools' financial health.

Even some who support tougher standards say such measures don't address the central problem in public school cafeterias: that schools have a financial incentive to serve unhealthful food.

"It's a bizarre system that needs to be fixed," said Erik Peterson, spokesman for the School Nutrition Association, which represents food managers and workers.

Like most school food service programs, Calvert lunchrooms operate as a self-sustaining business that pays for salaries, benefits, maintenance, overhead and even construction.

But Donald L. Knodle II, the county's food service coordinator, said he must meet those goals with a financial albatross around his neck: the National School Lunch Program, a federal program designed to provide healthful and affordable meals to students.

The average high school lunch costs Calvert about $3.63 in food and labor costs, but to encourage participation, the county charges only $1.75, Knodle said. The school district loses less on lunches it is required to provide free to low-income students, because the federal and state governments reimburse $2.35 for them. But it still loses.

"The more meals you sell, the more money you lose," Knodle said.
Yet Calvert's $4.3 million food program made a $138,000 profit last year through sales of more than 70 a la carte items, ranging from stuffed-crust pizza to onion rings, products also known in education parlance as "competitive foods."

"That is the only way to balance the budget at this point," Knode said.

Knode said every a la carte item is marked up at least 100 percent. Those food sales account for more than 50 percent of the program's revenue and all of its profits. Junk food is subsidizing the school lunch program, Knode said.

Inside her small office at the back of Huntingtown High's cafeteria, Burns estimated that about 75 percent of the school's 1,200 students buy a la carte items. Of the 2,079 food items sold a la carte one day last week, she said 1,384 were junk foods, such as nachos smothered in cheese, sugar-loaded smoothies and chicken nuggets.

On Wednesday, most students at Huntingtown streamed past the single cafeteria line serving school lunches and headed for the three bustling queues for a la carte offerings. Margie Maresca, 15, picked up two slices of pepperoni pizza, an order of chicken nuggets and a can of sweetened iced tea. The freshman said she never eats the regular school lunches.

"They're nasty," she said. "They're just disgusting."

A 2001 study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which runs the federal school lunch program, found that a la carte food items and snacks from vending machines "undermine the effectiveness of the school meal programs and discourage student participation."

Jean Daniel, a spokeswoman for the USDA, said the agency encourages schools to sell more-healthful food. But she said the department has no jurisdiction over a la carte items.

Peterson and some health advocates say that in an ideal world, a la carte options would be banned from school lunch rooms, so that schools could focus on providing students the more healthful national school lunches.

But Peterson said fully funding a universal school lunch program could cost an additional $6 billion, a sum that Congress, already facing record deficits, appears unlikely to fund in the near future.

Parents and health advocates have been increasingly successful in agitating for tougher standards on junk food. At least 21 states have passed policies that restrict competitive foods in schools, according to the General Accounting Office.

In February, the Maryland Board of Education approved voluntary guidelines that call for limits on sugar and fat content for foods in elementary and middle schools. Worried that many counties might not adopt the guidelines, Del. Joan F. Stern (D-Montgomery) has introduced a bill to make the guidelines mandatory for all grade levels, including high school.

In Montgomery County, where school officials decided to adopt the guidelines in September, a la carte revenue has decreased slightly in some cafeterias, while national school lunch sales increased by 1,000 meals a day in secondary schools, said Marla Caplon, a Montgomery food service supervisor.

As she counted up cash from the lunchroom cash registers, Burns said she isn't sure what financial impact the nutrition standards would have on her cafeteria. But Burns hesitated for a moment as she glanced at workers restocking chocolate doughnuts and cream-filled cupcakes for students to grab the next day.

"We're doing a good little profit here," she said, "but at whose expense?"
Kids Choose Junk Food in School
Hamburgers, Cookies, French Fries Are Top Sellers in School Cafeterias

WebMD Medical News

Aug. 1, 2005 -- Hamburgers, cookies, and French fries are top sellers at U.S. high schools, despite what's on the menu for lunch.

A new study shows many of the items sold in school cafeterias, vending machines, school stores, and by clubs during the school day are of low nutritional value and may contribute to childhood obesity.

In the first study of so-called "competitive foods" sold in schools, researchers surveyed public high schools in Pennsylvania and found the top-selling categories of a la carte items in cafeterias were:

- Hamburgers, pizza, and sandwiches
- Cookies, crackers, cakes, pastries, and other baked goods not low in fat
- French fries
- Salty snacks not low in fat
- Carbonated beverages

In addition, the most popular food items sold in school stores or by school clubs were candy bars and chocolate.

Researchers say the good news is that water and fruit juice were the most commonly sold vending machine items but more than half of schools offer carbonated beverages and sugary soft drinks to students in vending machines.

The results of the study appear in the August issue of Pediatrics.

Top Food Sellers at School

Researchers say 15% of school-aged children are overweight and the diets of adolescents are of lower quality than those of any other age group.

In an effort to improve students' diets and provide nutritious foods, the government regulates what's sold as part of the national school lunch program. But sales of other foods at school are minimally regulated.

Researchers say school food service directors are put in the position of appealing to students' tastes, which tend to favor foods low in nutritional value, while planning meals that meet U.S. nutritional guidelines. Many of these programs are also required to be financially self-supporting.

The study suggests that a la carte food sales provide a major source of income for schools with sales averaging $700 per day in Pennsylvania high schools, 85% of which receive no financial support from their school districts.
Other results of the study include:

Water is the most popular item offered in school vending machines with 72% of schools offering bottled water. But 59% of schools offer carbonated beverages in their vending machines.

67% of school stores sell food items, and the top-selling items were candy bars and other forms of candy.

Chocolate candy was the most popular item sold by school clubs during school hours, followed by subs or hoagies and high-fat baked goods.
S.F. schools join war on obesity, ban junk food
Soda, candy to be banished -- but only
from cafeterias
Ray Delgado, Chronicle Staff Writer
Wednesday, January 15, 2003

Despite the loss of revenue involved, San Francisco public schools have joined a small but growing list of districts across the country that are fighting obesity in students by banning soft drinks and candy.

The board unanimously approved a resolution Tuesday night to eliminate the sale of sodas and unhealthy snacks throughout the district's 114 schools beginning next school year, a move that could potentially leave the district's food nutrition program $500,000 in the red.

The resolution will also create a school nutrition task force whose objective will be finding ways to eliminate unhealthy levels of fat, sugar and salt from breakfasts and lunches served in cafeterias. The resolution was sponsored by outgoing board President Jill Wynns and Commissioner Dan Kelly.

"The goal here is to begin looking at our school nutrition policy broadly in order to make it better," said Kelly, a pediatrician. "We need to make sure that all the choices available are good ones."

School districts in Oakland and Los Angeles also have banned junk food and soft drinks, and Sacramento schools are considering doing the same.

But San Francisco's resolution would only eliminate sodas and snacks sold in cafeterias, not those in vending machines or student stores, a problem that will have to be addressed by the task force.

Paula Baum, a school district nurse, told the board she has seen students "eating candy before breakfast in the morning. . . . We have to consider the costs to the health of our students if we don't proceed ahead."

There has been little opposition to the proposal, but it has been criticized as short-sighted by the soft drink industry, which has become increasingly alarmed as more districts consider similar bans.

"We are in agreement that obesity among children is a problem, but we feel very strongly that banning soft drinks will have no impact on that problem," said Sean McBride, a spokesman for the National Soft Drinks Association. "If (board members) want to be constructive in addressing obesity, they should focus on more nutrition education and daily physical education classes."
The meeting began with an election to replace the outgoing board president. As expected, former Muni chief Emilio Cruz won by a 4-3 vote with the support of Chris Mar, Mark Sanchez and Sarah Lipson.

But not before commissioners Wynns, Kelly and Eddie Chin made a last-ditch effort to convince the board to choose Kelly.

Several speakers before Tuesday's meeting also had pleaded with the board to support Kelly, a four-term board member. They questioned Cruz’s attendance record and commitment to education. Since he was appointed to the board in 2001, Cruz has missed 25 out of 58 various board meetings while Kelly only missed three.

But Cruz said he would take the appointment seriously.

"I feel small in this seat," he said. "There are big shoes to fill."

Among other items to be voted on by the board Tuesday night was a controversial anti-war resolution sponsored by commissioners Eric Mar and Mark Sanchez. The original resolution called for promoting a districtwide anti-war rally and creating a curriculum culled from the resources of anti-war groups to be used from kindergarten on up.

But even before the board meeting, the resolution was hit with a wave of criticism. Mar and Sanchez decided to submit a softened version of the resolution that deleted mention of the rally, listed the organizations in a separate attachment as possible resources and allowed the district to determine age-appropriate guidelines.

The resolution includes a clause that would allow students, teachers and staff members who object to the program to decline to participate.

But the revisions weren’t good enough to many parents who spoke out at the meeting against the district’s involvement in a political issue.

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http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2003/01/15/BA220952.DTL

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SCHOOL NEWS

**Junk Food: Just Say No!**

New rules crack down on junk food in school cafeterias

New Jersey's school cafeterias are leading the way to wellness. A law that takes effect statewide this fall will limit the amount of fat allowed in snacks sold or served in school lunchrooms. According to the law, snacks can't contain more than 8 grams of fat and 2 grams of saturated fat per serving. Candy is banned. So are foods and drinks whose main ingredient is sugar.

The healthy changes can already be seen in the lunchroom at Columbus Elementary School in Lodi, New Jersey. "I eat carrots or apples every day," says Alan Espino, a 10-year-old student at Columbus. Students are stocking up on carrots, celery, apples and oranges. Greasy hamburgers and french fries aren't even an option. Pizza now comes with whole wheat crust and hot dogs have whole wheat buns.

**The Move Toward Nationwide Nutrition in Schools**

New Jersey is not alone in its campaign for wellness. A program that began in 2004 may be partly responsible for a nationwide trend toward healthier school lunches. The program requires schools that receive lunch money from the federal government to try to fight childhood obesity in their cafeterias. Many states are now insisting that school cafeterias carry healthy food and drink choices. At least 17 states in 2005 and 11 states in 2006 signed some form of nutrition legislation, or law.

The trend may be catching on. The School Nutrition Association surveys students in kindergarten through eighth grade each year. Their survey results show that french fries dropped in popularity between 1998 and 2006, while fresh vegetables got more popular. Be on the lookout: Healthy choices like carrots and celery may be coming soon to a cafeteria near you.

*By Andrea Delbanco*