

## **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Summer Writing Assignment**

**Prompt:** There are many factors that motivate students' eating habits. How can schools provide nutritious foods that meet students' nutritional needs and include foods that they're likely to eat?

Write an argumentative essay for the school board about the best way for your school to meet the challenge of providing students with nutritional lunch options that students will actually eat. Use the information presented in the texts to support your points. Make sure to include information from more than one passage in your essay.

Manage your time carefully so that you can

- read the passages;
- plan your response;
- write your response; and
- revise and edit your response.

Be sure to

- include a claim;
- address counterclaims;
- use evidence from multiple sources; and
- avoid overly relying on one source.

Your response should be in the form of a multiparagraph essay

### **Sources**

## **Source 1: from On the Run . . . but Not Running on Empty**

by Cindy Argentine

1 Kids are busy. Eating takes time. How can you eat well while still getting to school, band, and soccer practice? Let's take a look at how some kids in America are managing this.

### **I Hear the Bus!**

2 For Michael, 14, the bus comes at 7:07 a.m. Lunch isn't until 12:30 p.m. "I need a lot for breakfast," he says. He likes eggs—hard-boiled, fried, or scrambled—with toast and orange juice. "If we aren't having eggs, Mom makes me eat a handful of walnuts with my oatmeal, or she'll give me some Greek yogurt and honey. She also gives me fruit, like pineapple chunks or a banana. Sometimes I'm running out the door as I finish!"

3 Megan, 16, heads to high school at 7:30. She likes oatmeal or a bagel with peanut butter for breakfast, but doesn't always have time for that. "Sometimes I wake up late, like this morning, actually!" she says. "I

## **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Summer Writing Assignment**

had to grab a bag of frosted shredded wheat and a juice box to have when I got to school.”

### **Snacking After School**

4 Connie, 10, gets a ride straight from school to piano lessons once a week. “My mom has a snack for me in the car when she picks me up from school. It could be fruit, a piece of cheese, or some peanut-butter pretzels.”

5 To learn more about after-school snacking, I checked in with a sixth-grade class that has an early lunch-time (11:30 a.m.). Some of these kids are ravenous after school! I asked them to list three of the foods they eat most often when they get home. First-place answer? Fruit! Students listed apples, oranges, bananas, and pears. Second-place? Candy. (It was early November when I surveyed them, shortly after a certain candy-filled holiday.) Milk and cookies tied for third.

### **My Practice Is at Dinnertime**

6 Suppertime sports can make dinner complicated. If you’ve got brothers or sisters, or you play several sports, your family might have an activity on the calendar every night at dinnertime. The problem: kids need to power up before practice, but they don’t want a big meal right before strenuous exercise. The solution: have a heavy snack or simple, small meal after school, and then eat again after the practice.

7 Calvin, 12, often faces this situation. He and his brother Ross both play several sports, along with their two sisters. Calvin says, “I eat stuff with a lot of carbs before practice. I’ll make a bagel with cream cheese, or a small sandwich like turkey and mayo on a toasted bagel.” He has dinner with his family when he gets home. “We usually eat on the late side, like 7, 8, or 9 p.m.,” he adds.

### **Think Ahead**

8 When you’re rushed and hungry, the easiest things to grab are pre-packaged snacks like cookies, candy, and chips. But those foods don’t always give you the nutrition—complex carbs, healthy fats, protein, and vitamins— that your body needs.

9 Megan fits nutrition into her active days by packing her own lunches. “At high school there are so many options for lunch, and it’s not as structured as at middle or elementary school, so people don’t always choose healthy stuff. Some friends of mine have nacho chips and cheese every day.” She usually packs a sandwich (peanut butter and jelly or turkey), fruit, cheese or yogurt, and maybe carrots or cucumber slices. “I was really into sugar snap

## **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Summer Writing Assignment**

peas for a while,” she laughs. Her best time-saving tip? Take advantage of Mom or Dad’s hard work the night before: “Sometimes I take leftovers, like this pasta Mom makes with basil pesto, snow peas, green onions, red peppers, and cheese—it’s my favorite thing ever to take to school.”

10 When I asked Megan why she thought nutrition mattered, she had this to say: “High school is like the basis for your eating habits in college, when your parents aren’t there to tell you what to do. I think a lot of people just forget about it, because they’re focused on practice, school, tests.” But she thinks it’s important. “High school is a time when people are growing,” she says. “When they have healthy eating habits, that really sets them up for good lifestyles for the rest of their life.”

### **Source 2: from Kids Love Sweets**

by Alice Andre-Clark

1 Have you ever tried to coax your parents into going for an ice cream sundae two days in a row, and failed? Probably so. Have your parents ever tried to talk you into going for an ice cream sundae twice in one week, and failed? Not so likely. Our genes and our environment can help determine what kinds of foods we like, but kids seem to be hard-wired to love sweets. Scientists are beginning to learn about why children crave sweets more than adults do, and why some kids love sweets just a little, and others a whole lot.

#### **Growth and Energy**

2 Growing bones need plenty of energy. And sugar provides it powerfully and quickly. Psychologist Susan Coldwell wondered if children crave sweet foods because they’re growing. Explains Coldwell, “We asked kids [ages 11–15] to try some sweet drinks. Some of these kids were still growing fast, while others had pretty much stopped growing. We could figure out how much each kid was growing by measuring a chemical [called NTx] in their pee.” Coldwell found that the kids with the most NTx—the ones who were growing fastest—were the same ones who preferred the sweetest drinks.

#### **Feel Good Power**

3 For growing kids, eating sweet food can actually take away pain. Julie Mennella’s team at Monell Chemical Senses Center tried dipping kids’ hands in chilly water. When kids with strong sweet preferences held a sugary drink in their mouths, they could keep their hands underwater for a longer time. Sweet foods may also make emotional pain easier to bear. Kids who have been depressed are more likely to choose sweet foods as their favorites,

## **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Summer Writing Assignment**

Monell researchers found. Mennella says, “Children like sweet food not just for taste, but for how it makes them feel.”

### **In the Genes**

4 You may have noticed that some of your friends are happy with an occasional small dessert, and others are more like candy-seeking missiles. Why do some kids love sweets so much more than others? Part of the answer is in their genes. Finnish food scientist Kaisu Keskitalo has calculated that

genes are as much as 50 percent responsible for how often we eat sweets and how pleasant we find them. Mennella has found that kids who have a gene that makes them sensitive to bitter tastes prefer especially sweet drinks and cereals.

### **So, What’s a Kid to Do?**

5 We all know that sugary foods can make us gain weight and get cavities, and take us away from the vitamin-rich foods that we need to stay healthy. Yet, your growing body is giving you a powerful desire for sweets, your genes might be pushing you in the same direction, and your friends might tease you for eating well.

6 Good news! Things will get easier. You’ll probably always enjoy the taste of cookies, but by the time you’re sixteen, says Coldwell, you’re unlikely to love them quite as much as you do now.

### **Taming the Sugar Monster**

7 Kids say that it’s hard to eat well because finding nutritious food often takes some trouble, and it’s so quick and easy to pick up a sugary, packaged treat. They also wish that nutritious food tasted as good as junk food.

8 Some kids are finding that they can combine just a few flavors to make an after-school snack that’s delicious and nutritious, and requires only minutes of preparation. Rachel Davitt, 11, dips carrots in low-fat ranch dressing. Regina Silikovitz, 10, drops a straw or pretzel twist into a paper cup of orange juice and freezes it to make a juice pop. Other kids enjoy fruit-and-yogurt smoothies, peanut butter on apple slices, or a trail mix of cereal, raisins, and nuts.

9 You might also learn something in your school lunchroom. Cornell University economists David Just and Brian Wansink are redesigning cafeterias to help kids make better choices. Putting a lid on the ice cream freezer, creating an express line for kids not ordering chips and desserts, and

## **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Summer Writing Assignment**

asking kids if they want a salad all have surprisingly big effects. In the Randolph (New Jersey) School District, cafeteria workers get to know kids by name, says Dining Services Director Katie Filosa. That way, when they have a new vegetable to offer, they can say, “Caitlin, try the squash. You’ll like it!”

### **Source 3: What Teenagers Need to Thrive**

by Farad Tindley

1 In a typical teenage day, there are a million things to think about. You’re flying down the hall toward your locker and fielding thoughts as if they were dodgeballs: Did I submit my homework? Did I charge my phone? Where is my charger? Where is my phone? Did I grab the house keys? Did I forget my whole bag???

2 Then, amidst a cyclone of stress and busyness, hunger hits. Weak-in-the-knees-low-blood-sugar-I’m-going-to-fall-over type hunger. You need food now. But then you remember another thing you forgot: your lunch. Be honest, what is your first thought? Take a second and choose the option that best completes the following sentence:

3 I’m “starving” and

A) I’ll eat absolutely anything.

B) I’ll eat what is fast, tasty, and close.

C) I’m headed to the nearest produce section where I’ll select the freshest ingredients and put together the most nutritious meal possible because I do whatever is best for my body, always, every day, no matter what.

4 If you chose C, you win! But for most, A or B is the likely answer. Despite our best intentions, life in the fast lane often keeps us from making the best choices. It’s difficult to do the right things all the time: cut out junk food, get proper nutrition and optimal exercise and enough sleep, and keep up with schoolwork and other work and remember everything!

5 But . . . let’s say we were going to give it a try. As teenagers, what would we need in order to really thrive?

#### **Nutrition**

6 The rules of healthy eating are pretty much the same for all humans. We should limit extra sugar and empty carbohydrates (candy, pastas, pastries), eat lots of vegetables and fruits (multicolored), choose lean proteins (fish,

## **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Summer Writing Assignment**

chicken), avoid fried foods, and cut way back on saturated fats (most of the crispy, salty stuff). But what you may not have known is these “shoulds” are doubly important for teens, because our bodies are still developing.

7 For bone growth and strength, teens need the mineral calcium. Each day, adults require 1,000 milligrams and teens need 1,300 milligrams, roughly equivalent to the amount in four 8-ounce glasses of milk. As we mature and our tastes change, we often replace nutritious milk with stimulating coffee, soda, or other bottled drinks. This switch means we should supplement our diets with four servings of yogurt, hard cheeses, or low-fat cottage cheese each day to keep up calcium intake. Also, for bone density, add 400 international units (equivalent to 10 micrograms) daily of vitamin D, which the body requires in order to absorb calcium. Easy sources of vitamin D include eggs, fish, and mushrooms.

8 Another necessity is the mineral iron. Red blood cells use iron to carry oxygen to every cell in the body, and iron plays a key role in maintaining optimal brain function and energy levels for teens. Per day, teen males require 11 milligrams, while teen females require 15 milligrams. Four to six ounces of beef, poultry, pork, clams, oysters, or eggs provides the right amount of daily iron. Nonmeat sources include nuts and vegetables such as spinach, green peas, and asparagus. In this case, adult females require more as they age—18 milligrams until age 50. For adult males, the need drops to 9 milligrams per day.

9 Regarding overall health, we hear it often but it bears repeating: most fast food is not good food. Why do so many of us choose it? It tastes good. But, when compared to home-cooked, nutritious choices, quick foods at restaurants and convenience stores contain high levels of saturated fat, salt, sugar, and much less fiber and fewer nutrients (including calcium and iron) than our bodies require. If you order food at a counter or drive through, it is easy to consume hundreds of additional calories without even realizing it. Cheeseburgers and fries may be tempting, but studies show that poor diets cause weight gain, obesity, high blood pressure, fatigue, and concentration problems—even in young people who are otherwise healthy. (That’s right. Even if you are in good health, junk food is bad for you!)

### **Activity**

10 When it comes to lifestyle, the best idea is to keep moving. Physical activity builds healthy muscles and bones and can significantly reduce depression and anxiety. Mental-health issues affect people of all ages, but nearly 20 percent of teens experience depression, versus approximately 7 percent of adults. Anxiety is often an unfortunate companion to depression.

## **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Summer Writing Assignment**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends at least 60 minutes of physical activity for teens each day. It should be mostly aerobic activity, but also include muscle-strengthening exercises like push-ups and sit-ups. If that sounds like a lot, just remember, every bit counts. Take a break from sitting and go for a walk, or opt for stairs instead of elevators.

11 For adults, the CDC recommends 150 minutes of exercise per week. This equals 20 minutes per day or 50 minutes or more several times a week. In comparison, the CDC says teens require 420 minutes per week, minimum— that’s one hour a day, which seems healthier than trying to cram all that exercise into one or two days.

12 One hour of movement each day might make us feel smarter, too. Studies suggest that regular activity increases the ability to focus on difficult tasks and concentrate for extended periods of time, which can have a positive effect on study habits and academic achievement. Exercise also raises the body’s level of endorphins, the hormones known as “natural painkillers.” The higher the endorphin level, the better we feel.

13 On the flip side, too much time spent lounging on the couch or sitting around talking, eating, or working can have long-term consequences that no one wants to consider: chronic diseases like diabetes, cancer, heart disease, asthma, and arthritis, or even premature death—the scary list goes on, but you get the idea. Physical activity: good.

### **Sleep**

14 Sleep is arguably a favorite pastime of teens, so it’s not surprising that we want our 8–10 hours of beauty rest each night. But, did you know there are actually biological reasons we stay up late? During adolescence, the body’s circadian rhythm, or internal clock, changes, pushing back the time we begin to feel sleepy each night to around 11:00 P.M. It’s tempting to stay up much later, but the reality of school and work obligations don’t change to accommodate morning zombies, so getting to bed early behooves us.

15 The National Sleep Foundation says that sleep is like food for the brain; it is just as vital to the body as air and water. Lacking sleep can cause teens to be moody, unpleasant, and also unproductive—dragging through your shift at work won’t impress anyone. There can also be frightening consequences, like falling asleep at the wheel.

16 If daytime sleepiness is an ongoing issue, try some ways to make yourself tired earlier in the evening. Wake up extra early to complete a task or do a little exercise. If you normally rise at 6:00 A.M., try 5:00 A.M. Instead of rolling over and hitting the snooze button, pry your eyes open and force both

## **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Summer Writing Assignment**

feet to the floor. After a few days, you may start to feel sleepy earlier, then you may sleep more, and then you may feel better all around. Another idea is to increase daily exercise so your body requires additional repair time each night.

### **Strive to Thrive**

17 If it feels overwhelming to try perfecting everything this minute, take it a step at a time. Make small improvements in diet, activity level, and sleep time. For example: have some healthy snacks on hand, turn off electronics ten minutes earlier each night, or hop on a bike or walk instead of taking the bus or hitching a ride with a friend. Little changes here and there can make a big difference in the long run. Chances are, life isn't going to get any less busy. We should do what we can today to help ourselves thrive tomorrow!