

Entering into March each year, we begin to think about spring with its warmer, longer days. Yet as educators, the staff also thinks about the ISAT's (Illinois State Achievement Tests). The teachers at Schiesher have prepared the students academically to do their best. As parents, you can also prepare your child to achieve their best by taking a few simple steps at home.

The first thing you can do for your child is to make sure he/she has had a good night's sleep. Elementary aged students should be sleeping between nine and eleven hours each night. During our sleep, many important processes take place. Our bodies repair/rebuild tissues allowing physical growth to occur, and there is a "recharging and review" in the part of the brain that deals with our emotions and memory. This recharge/review allows us to be ready for the next day's social contacts or situations, and it also replays what was learned that day. This replaying that is done while we sleep moves the information from our short term memory into our long term memory. The best start to any morning begins with a good night's rest.

Secondly, a healthy breakfast will give your child the essential fuel they need to have a successful day. It's true what they say, "You are what you eat." Food not only affects our body physically but also has an impact on our moods and emotions. The food we eat plays a role in the production of neurotransmitters, the chemicals in our brain, which have a profound effect on mood, memory and behavior. One of these chemicals is dopamine. Dopamine causes people to think more quickly, react more rapidly and feel more motivated. Some foods that are linked to an elevated dopamine level are protein rich like meat, eggs, milk and cheese. Protein, being a brain energizing food, makes it especially important to include daily in breakfast.

It is also important to maintain a steady level of glucose in our blood so the brain can work properly. The brain uses one-third of the energy we eat so it should not be a surprise that a hungry brain is not a happy brain. Highly refined foods loaded with sugar like doughnuts, sugary cereals, white bread and processed baked goods cause a person's blood sugar (glucose) to fall dramatically a couple of hours later. This can lead to many physical complaints, such as stomach and headaches, as well as affecting mood and learning. Complex carbohydrates supply glucose, the brain's main energy supply, at a gradual and steady pace, not like the roller coaster effect of refined-sugary foods. Good choices would include whole grain breads and cereals, brown rice and pasta. The best breakfast you can offer your child every day to maximize their school experience should contain a protein, complex carbohydrate, and fruit or vegetable for necessary vitamins.

Finally, encourage good hydration. Water is essential for our bodies to work properly. It helps with breathing, digestion, and in forming proteins; giving our brain the necessary oxygen, food and protein structures to make new connections between brain cells which form when we are learning.

Ensuring that your child has the proper sleep, breakfast and sufficient amounts of water through out their day will help them to achieve academically, socially and emotionally not only during ISAT testing but every day.

