

Improving Nutrition Education Curricula in the Philadelphia School District: From Hippocrates and Galen to the USDA

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This capstone project analyzes the efficacy of current nutrition education curricula in the Philadelphia School District and proposes improvements to contemporary lesson plans, which are informed by nutritional thinking of the ancient Greek medical tradition. It argues that many of our clinically approved nutritional practices have deep roots in ancient Greek medical literatures, which offered remarkable insight into the interaction of nutrition and diet with the health of individuals and populations as a whole.

The first part of her capstone paper examines theories on the rise in obesity among children and adolescents since 1988, followed by an outline of Philadelphia's nutrition policies in and outside of the classroom. The second chapter looks at ancient nutrition and exercise practices, tracing their origins through an analysis of relevant treatises of Hippocrates and Galen. The third synthesizes these contemporary and ancient approaches, asserting that current nutrition education curricula are unconsciously predicated on ancient Greek medical principles and can be further improved through the consideration of other Hippocratic and Galenic theories. The chapter further discusses existing similarities between ancient and contemporary diet advice, including a common focus on moderation, calorie intake and outtake balance, and recommendations of specific foods. Revisions to current curricula are subsequently proposed. The ancient practice of making food choices according to the seasons is advocated, as well as a personalization of nutrition lesson plans to be tailored to each individual student.

A general conclusion of the project is that answers for our future can be enriched by a fuller understanding of history, and showing that ancient Greek medical thinkers pointed the way toward sound nutritional policy in striking ways. Hippocrates laid a dietetic foundation in the fifth century BC, and when these roots are fully recognized, they will undoubtedly support Philadelphia's growing tree of nutritional knowledge.