

# **GROWING HEALTHY KIDS**

## **Expository Writing Assignment**

**Paragraph 1:** Introduction/Thesis - Briefly introduce the reader to the topic “Growing Healthy Kids”. What were the main points in the article?

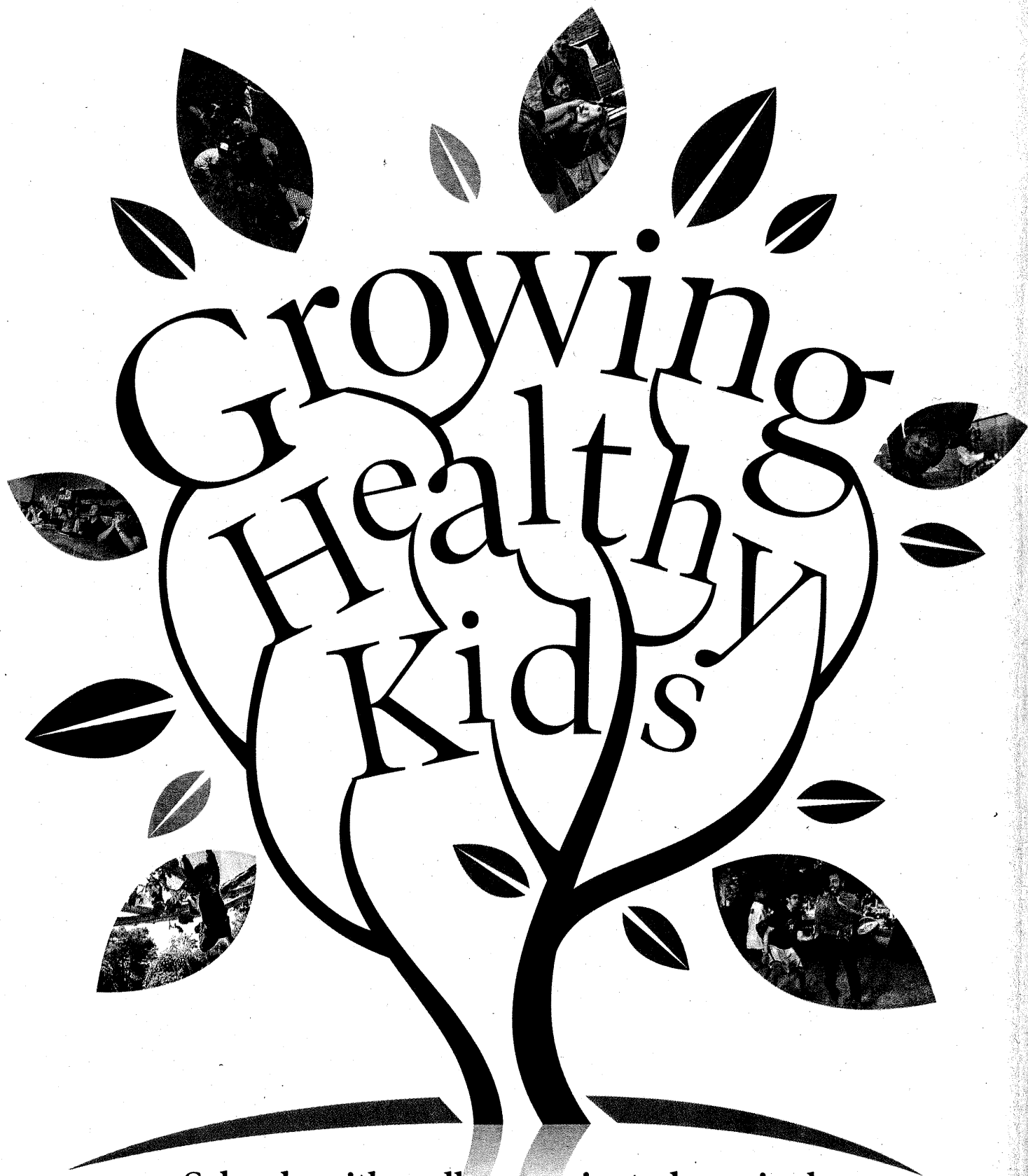
**Thesis Example:** “ Many schools have been experimenting with a more holistic approach to education. These schools teach with the belief that education needs to involve the “whole child”. Students in schools that address health and wellness are seeing measurable academic improvements.”

**Paragraph 2:** Summarize the *Academy of Global Citizenship* (the first of the three schools discussed in the article). Name of school, location, What is it like to attend this school?

**Paragraph 3:** Summarize the *Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School* (the second of the three schools in the article). Name of school, location, What is it like to attend this school?

**Paragraph 4:** Summarize *The Khabele School* (the third school discussed in the article). Name of school, location, What is it like to attend this school?

**Paragraph 5:** *Conclusion - What are the benefits of attending a school that is wellness-oriented? What affect does addressing health and wellness have on academic achievement? Use evidence from the text to support your claims. How could your school incorporate more wellness into its curriculum?*



**Schools with wellness-oriented curricula teach students how to thrive — and are leading the way for other institutions to start doing the same.**

# To

get to the Academy of Global Citizenship (AGC) on Chicago's South Side, one drives down Cicero Avenue, past Popeyes, Family Dollar, Mattress Bargains, and Buy & Cell Mobile. Turning down a side street, I see petite, backpack-laden elementary school students trotting down the sidewalk with their parents. They're headed for a former parking lot that now hosts a play yard, chicken coop and garden. They'll pass through it on their way inside to join classmates, teachers and other parents for an organic breakfast cooked by parent Heriberto Arriola, a.k.a. Chef Eddie.

After breakfast, I follow a group of kids to their first activity of the day — yoga class. Twenty-five second graders slide onto the floor in a darkened room and spend a few quiet moments rolling their shoulders and stretching to soft piano music.

"Take a deep breath in, and a lion's breath out," says their teacher, Kyla Saphir. "Let's focus our bodies and minds on the positive day ahead of us. Our voices are off; our bodies are still. Put your wish for the day inside your hands."

A typical day at AGC always includes yoga, as well as two whole-food meals shared with staff members and family volunteers. There's also a daily wellness class that teaches children about healthy social and emotional habits in addition to physical fitness. The play yard, with its raised-bed vegetable garden and wind turbine, hosts the afternoon recess. "We pretty much go outside every day," explains

second grader Delilah Vazquez, "even when it's raining."

A charter school that operates under the umbrella of Chicago Public Schools, AGC and schools like it adhere to the principle that education needs to involve the "whole child," not just her intellect. This doesn't mean these institutions ignore academic development, however. That's because both educators and health advocates agree that addressing health and wellness significantly improves student achievement.

It's common knowledge that obesity and type 2 diabetes rates are skyrocketing among American adults, but children are undergoing their own crisis. In 2010 more than one in three children and adolescents in the United States was overweight or obese. This rate has doubled in children and tripled in adolescents in the past 30 years, reports the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. According to the 2011 National Diabetes Statistics, rates of type 2 diabetes, rarely seen in children before the 1990s, are rising along with their weight: Between 2002 and 2005, there were about 3,600 new cases a year. And parent surveys from the National Health Interview Survey indicate that ADHD diagnoses are also on the rise, increasing about 3 percent per year from 1997 to 2006 and 5.5 percent per year from 2003 to 2007.

In light of these trends, schools have begun to experiment with a wide variety of health initiatives. Last year, South Lakewood Elementary in Lakewood, Colo., instituted physically active "brain breaks" after officials

there were forced to cut recess to meet state-mandated academic hours. Lamar Middle School in Austin, Texas, brought outdoor recess back with the help of parent volunteers. And New York City public schools have partnered with prestigious cooking schools that provide chefs-in-training to improve the quality of cafeteria fare.

A growing body of research suggests that physical fitness and nutrition are linked to cognition, and programs at schools like AGC have produced measurable improvements in test scores. But while healthy school initiatives are multiplying, health-oriented schools are still the exception rather than the rule.

"Typically, people in education have addressed the health of children in a haphazard way rather than creating policies and programs that are strategically planned to influence academic achievement," says Charles Basch, a professor at Columbia University Teachers College who studies the link between student health and academic performance. "It's not surprising that there's been limited progress in turning around schools despite lots of efforts, because no matter what reforms are initiated, they won't work unless students are motivated and able to learn."

Schools that take a holistic approach, addressing the physical, mental and social-emotional well-being of children, offer the best environment for student success, says Basch. Here are three schools that are doing just that — and leading the way for other schools to follow. →



## Academy of Global Citizenship

Like all Chicago Public Schools, the Academy of Global Citizenship (AGC) is open to any and all students. A few of the kids here need help tying their shoes. Most of them laugh hysterically at BrainPOP cartoons. Some wiggle in their seats at lunch, sucking the juice from their oranges. It looks like a typical school, until you start noticing the subtleties — bags of organic produce from a school-sponsored purchase program lined up to be sent home, worm compost bins propping open doors, seedlings sprouting under grow lights — and a few not-so-subtle amenities, such as a chicken named Buttercup in the development office.

AGC founder and executive director Sarah Elizabeth Ippel began developing her educational philosophy around 2001, while she was attending university in Cambridge, England. It was the beginning of a “self-initiated quest” to study international systems of education.

“I visited 80 countries over the last

10 years,” says Ippel, “and throughout that experience I recognized disparities across the globe in terms of access to quality education, how health challenges were having an impact on children’s abilities to learn, and how everyday decisions were having an impact on the state of our planet.”

**“There is substantial scientific research that points to the correlation between wellness, physical activity and students’ ability to learn, including outdoor time.”**

Ippel became convinced that addressing health-related issues would have a positive academic impact on students in the United States. These students — like their parents — often suffer the physical consequences of being overly desk-bound. “There is substantial scientific research that points to the correlation between wellness, physical activity and students’ ability to learn, including outdoor time,” she says.

Ippel moved to Chicago after gradu-

ate school, determined to open a school that would make international cultural awareness, environmental sustainability and positive health the core of its mission. She founded AGC in 2008.

The engaging curriculum and attention to student wellness have produced impressive results in the face of daunting challenges. Nearly eight of 10 AGC students come from low-income households, and the charter school gets only 75 percent of the funding received by typical public schools. Yet, it has increased student literacy rates by 63 percent since it opened. Ninety-three percent of general education students are meeting or exceeding math standards.

The school’s curriculum has had a ripple effect on families, as well. Gisela Alcantar, who has four children at AGC, says her kids practice the school’s earth-friendly habits at home, leading the family to recycle more and eat more organic foods. It appears that educating healthy kids helps create healthy adults — even if they don’t attend the school themselves.

Clockwise from top left: Sarah Elizabeth Ippel, founder and director of the academy; AGC students with a feathered colleague; students at AGC play outside daily; the garden, a key part of the AGC curriculum; students enjoying the outdoors in their own ways.



# Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School

Students at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School (MLK) in Berkeley, Calif., score higher than the state average on math, reading and science tests, but you won't find them engaged in endless academic drills under fluorescent lights. On a typical day, you're as likely to find kids digging in the school garden, chopping vegetables in the kitchen or checking for honey in the school's beehives as you are to find them memorizing algebraic formulas. Kids get a block of time to spend in the garden and kitchen-as-learning-lab during the school day, and many return after school for more digging and cooking. Classroom teachers take their English or science classes outside for lessons.

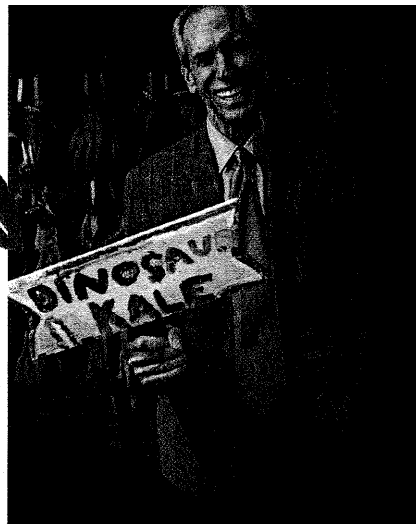
**"I don't ever remember any student being referred to the office from the garden or cooking class."**

Alice Waters, chef-owner of Berkeley's renowned Chez Panisse restaurant and a legendary advocate for local food, started the garden at King Middle School in 1996 after she made a public remark that the school grounds seemed neglected. Then-principal Neil Smith invited her to tour the school, and the Edible Schoolyard Project was born.

Smith, now interim co-superintendent of Berkeley Unified School District, says the garden has had a major impact on the school's entire culture. The kids love it, consistently ranking it second behind PE and sports on a survey of favorite activities every year. And happier, healthier students seem to perform better in all arenas.

"I don't ever remember any student being referred to the office from the garden or cooking class," Smith says.

The success of the Edible School-

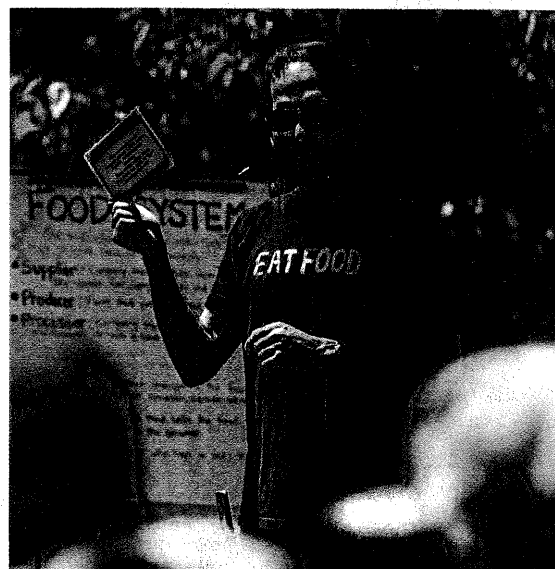


yard (ESY) Project in 2004 spawned Berkeley's School Lunch Initiative, designed to bring similar programs to schools throughout the district. The impact on student diets has been noteworthy. A 2010 evaluation of the initiative by the University of California, Berkeley, found that younger students exposed to these programs increased their fruit and vegetable intake by almost 1.5 servings per day, and that middle school students preferred in-season produce, ate more dark leafy greens than their peers and believed their food choices affected the environment.

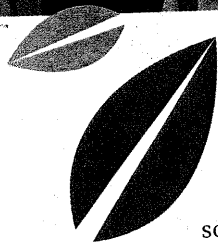
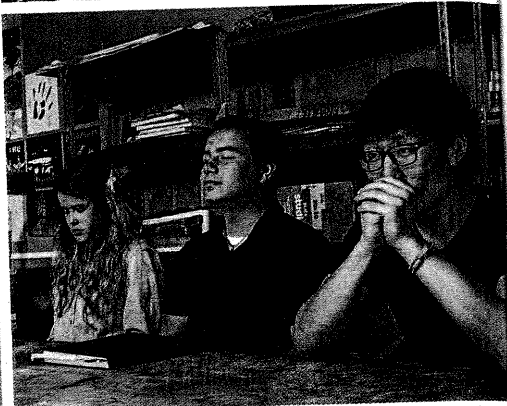
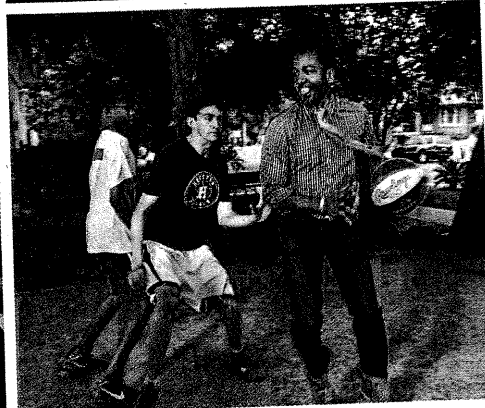
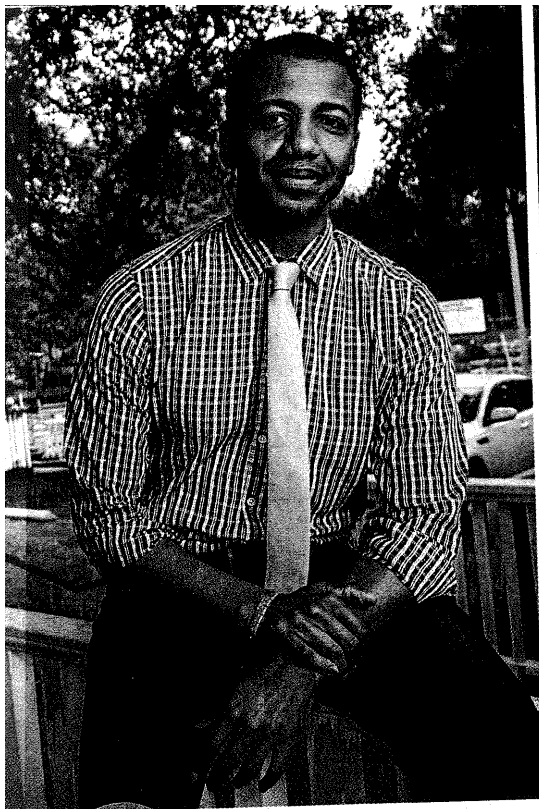
"My kids look at food differently now," says Griselda Cooney, whose two children attended MLK when they were younger. "We'll go out and buy a sandwich and my teenager will be like, it tastes really weird; it's not fresh. We don't do processed food anymore, and they don't crave Cheetos." Cooney's kids have moved on to high school, and she is now employed by ESY as the Family Class Coordinator at MLK.

Still, participants agree that the garden program is about more than breaking the junk-food habit; it promotes physical and intellectual exercise, cooperation and teamwork, and it gets kids outside. "It teaches students not just about growing tomatoes," Cooney says, "but the patience of seeing a plant grow from a seed you put in the ground."

A garden also conveys the fact that seedlings need proper care if they're going to become strong plants. Not a bad message to instill in kids' minds. →



Clockwise from top left: Neil Smith, former principal of MLK and host of the first Edible Schoolyard; MLK students planting a new crop; students learning about the larger picture of food production in their garden class; getting some sun during garden class never hurts.



## The Khabele School

Khotso Khabele and his wife, Moya, were expecting their first child soon after the events of 9/11 shook the United States, and it made him wonder how he would educate his own child in such a rapidly changing world. So in 2001, when the school where he had been teaching science closed, he and Moya founded The Khabele School in Austin, Texas, which serves students age 18 months through 12th grade.

"We're not always going to be able to anticipate what the world will look like in 20 years," Khabele explains, "but we can [teach] the ways of being that will increase the likelihood that kids will not only survive, but thrive."

The private school is guided by five key values: student well-being, environmental and cultural awareness, self-generated learning, self-expression, and leadership. Khabele says there's a reason well-being is foremost on the list. "Even if you score a 5 on your AP calculus test," he says, "you've got to be able to have creative ability, and that comes from a foundation of well-being."

In their wellness class, kids discuss study skills and personal organization, as well as tools for healthy living. These wellness lessons are embedded in all of the curriculum. Every class starts with "centering," a short meditative practice that promotes mindful breathing and compassion. And each ends with a debriefing, when students report to the teacher what they learned, whether they were able to focus, what they think they contributed and what they took away.

"It helps to set a different tone in the classroom," says science teacher David Heroy. "Just being heard is huge."

**"Even if you score a 5 on your AP calculus test, you've got to be able to have creative ability, and that comes from a foundation of well-being."**

Lunch at Khabele lasts 50 minutes, compared with the half hour or less allowed for eating and recess at most schools. The cafeteria sells everything from local energy bars to cooked-from-scratch hot lunches (seared salmon and grilled veggie kabobs, for instance)

throughout the day. And recently, middle school kids started attending gym class daily.

"Parents saw a change at home and teachers saw more focused students," Khabele says. "We found out that middle school might not be so hard with healthy wellness practices."

Finally, teachers report that many kids who hadn't fared so well at other schools succeed in this environment.

"There was one boy who went to different schools in town and never really fit in," Heroy says. "He was detailed-oriented and driven, and had a hard time connecting. But, on a six-day canoe-camping trip, he packed extra stuff, knowing the other kids wouldn't remember to bring enough socks or scarves or gloves. One person at a time, he doled out these things to different people. At the end of the trip when we circled up to debrief our experiences, students acknowledged him over and over again for his generosity. 'They love me!' he exclaimed after the trip. It was a turning point, and he ended up graduating and getting accepted into college at 14."

Clockwise from top left: Founder Khotso Khabele; music class, one of many opportunities for Khabele students to cultivate creativity; students do much of their learning away from desks; meditating before art class; Khabele and students playing basketball.

**F**uture plans for AGC include a new campus with a net-positive-energy school building with its own onsite water collection and treatment system, a greenhouse, orchard, native forest, barn, and yurts. These laudable goals notwithstanding, it's clear that kids can learn how to be healthy at school and improve academic performance in a much less ambitious setting. Increasing outdoor time, improving school meals, teaching kids to cook and garden, and implementing yoga classes and mindfulness techniques have shown good results in various settings — and these can happen anywhere. Columbia professor Charles Basch says that what really matters in any school is a commitment to make student health a fundamental part of its mission.

"I don't think this is just idealistic," he says. "It's very possible to do." ♦

**Sheila Mulrooney Eldred** is a freelance writer living in Minneapolis.

## Wellness Partners

**IF YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL** hasn't yet incorporated wellness into its curriculum, there are a number of organizations that will partner with institutions to provide programs like yoga and garden building. The Holistic Life Foundation in Baltimore, for example, teaches yoga and mindfulness techniques in West Baltimore elementary schools. The founders of the program (which inspired a pilot study showing the measurable effects of meditation on elementary school students) have since written a manual to be used by other schools. And the Wellness in the Schools organization in New York City has partnered with educators on a number of health-supportive initiatives, including improving cafeteria food and banning toxic cleaning products. To find or bring a partnership program to your area, visit one of the following websites for resources and inspiration:

### **The Edible Schoolyard** ([www.edibleschoolyard.org](http://www.edibleschoolyard.org))

This Berkeley, Calif.-based program aims to put a garden in every schoolyard, so the site is packed with practical resources for would-be garden builders.

### **WITS** ([www.wellnessintheschools.org](http://www.wellnessintheschools.org))

Wellness in the Schools partners mainly with schools in New York City, but check its website for a helpful list of health-centric organizations and resources that work with schools.

### **Mindful Schools** ([www.mindfulschools.org](http://www.mindfulschools.org))

This site offers online courses that teach the fundamentals of mindfulness practice to school staff so they can teach it to children.

## Take-Home Lessons

**MANY OF THE STRATEGIES** used by innovative educators can be incorporated at home. In fact, the aim of the Edible Schoolyard Program at King Middle School in Berkeley is for kids to teach their families what they've learned — and to use that knowledge in their own kitchens.

"The teachers here have shown us really easy recipes that you can do really quickly when you get home from work," one mom said after taking an after-school class with her son. "And it's not stressful; we have a good time. This class has made us be more playful in the kitchen. It's been fun to do things together; we talk together about what we're going to make."

If your kid's school hasn't incorporated wellness into its curriculum yet, try some of these "homework" ideas:

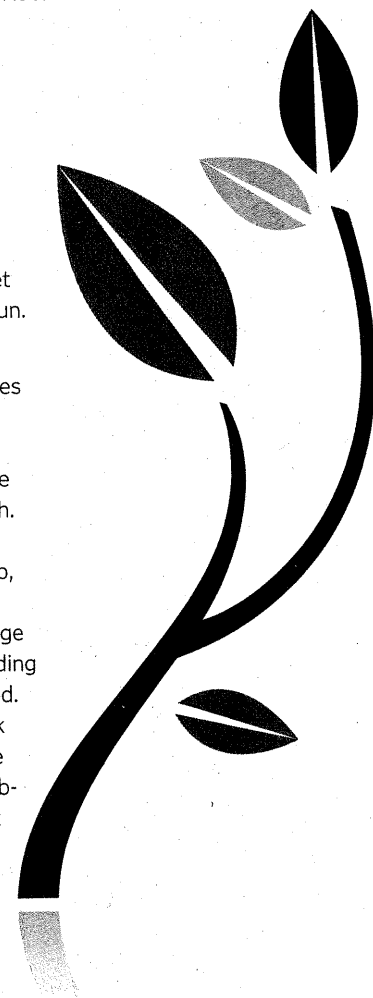
**Practice yoga.** No yoga mat required, although imagination is a plus. Kids love inventing their own poses. Check out [www.yogakids.com](http://www.yogakids.com) for ideas to get started.

**Have your kids read to their stuffed animals.** It builds empathy (not to mention reading skills), says Academy of Global Citizenship (AGC) wellness teacher Melissa Tobias.

**Grow a garden.** Check out the Edible Schoolyard Project's website ([www.edibleschoolyard.org](http://www.edibleschoolyard.org)) for step-by-step instructions on how to build and plant a high-yield container garden. Bonus: Your kids won't realize they're doing extra math homework.

**Let kids run.** One of the students' favorite activities in wellness class at AGC is also one of the simplest. Set up orange cones. Let kids run. Repeat daily!

**Sleep!** Several recent studies have targeted sleep deprivation as a key obstacle to student success. Make sure your child is getting enough. School-age kids usually need 10 to 11 hours of sleep, according to the National Sleep Foundation. Encourage healthy sleep habits by ending screen time well before bed. Limit liquids to milk or milk alternatives (if they can be tolerated) and water. Establish a bedtime routine that incorporates deep breathing or stretching.



### **SLIDESHOW!**

For additional images from our exclusive photo shoots at the schools featured here, go to [ELmag.com/schoolslideshow](http://ELmag.com/schoolslideshow).

## Six Traits Writing Rubric

	<b>6 Exemplary</b>	<b>5 Strong</b>	<b>4 Proficient</b>	<b>3 Developing</b>	<b>2 Emerging</b>	<b>1 Beginning</b>
<b>Ideas &amp; Content</b> <i>⌘ main theme</i> <i>⌘ supporting details</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exceptionally clear, focused, engaging with relevant, strong supporting detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear, focused, interesting ideas with appropriate detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evident main idea with some support which may be general or limited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Main idea may be cloudy because supporting detail is too general or even off-topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Purpose and main idea may be unclear and cluttered by irrelevant detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lacks central idea; development is minimal or non-existent</li> </ul>
<b>Organization</b> <i>⌘ structure</i> <i>⌘ introduction</i> <i>⌘ conclusion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effectively organized in logical and creative manner</li> <li>Creative and engaging intro and conclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong order and structure</li> <li>Inviting intro and satisfying closure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organization is appropriate, but conventional</li> <li>Attempt at introduction and conclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attempts at organization; may be a "list" of events</li> <li>Beginning and ending not developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of structure; disorganized and hard to follow</li> <li>Missing or weak intro and conclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of coherence; confusing</li> <li>No identifiable introduction or conclusion</li> </ul>
<b>Voice</b> <i>⌘ personality</i> <i>⌘ sense of audience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expressive, engaging, sincere</li> <li>Strong sense of audience</li> <li>Shows emotion: humour, honesty, suspense or life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate to audience and purpose</li> <li>Writer behind the words comes through</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evident commitment to topic</li> <li>Inconsistent or dull personality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voice may be inappropriate or non-existent</li> <li>Writing may seem mechanical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing tends to be flat or stiff</li> <li>Little or no hint of writer behind words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing is lifeless</li> <li>No hint of the writer</li> </ul>
<b>Word Choice</b> <i>⌘ precision</i> <i>⌘ effectiveness</i> <i>⌘ imagery</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Precise, carefully chosen</li> <li>Strong, fresh, vivid images</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Descriptive, broad range of words</li> <li>Word choice energizes writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language is functional and appropriate</li> <li>Descriptions may be overdone at times</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Words may be correct but mundane</li> <li>No attempt at deliberate choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monotonous, often repetitious, sometimes inappropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited range of words</li> <li>Some vocabulary misused</li> </ul>
<b>Sentence Fluency</b> <i>⌘ rhythm, flow</i> <i>⌘ variety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High degree of craftsmanship</li> <li>Effective variation in sentence patterns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Easy flow and rhythm</li> <li>Good variety in length and structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally in control</li> <li>Lack variety in length and structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some awkward constructions</li> <li>Many similar patterns and beginnings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Often choppy</li> <li>Monotonous sentence patterns</li> <li>Frequent run-on sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficult to follow or read aloud</li> <li>Disjointed, confusing, rambling</li> </ul>
<b>Conventions</b> <i>⌘ age appropriate, spelling, caps, punctuation, grammar</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exceptionally strong control of standard conventions of writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong control of conventions; errors are few and minor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Control of most writing conventions; occasional errors with high risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited control of conventions; frequent errors do not interfere with understanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frequent significant errors may impede readability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numerous errors distract the reader and make the text difficult to read</li> </ul>