

News Debate: "F" Is for Fat?

You aced algebra, cinched social studies, and sailed through science class. *¡Español!* No hay problema. English? Easy stuff.

Now for a sore subject: How's your weight? Do you get a high mark when you step on the scale? If so, and you live in Arkansas, your days of straight A's may soon be over.

A 2003 law in Arkansas requires the state's public schools to provide parents with an annual report of their child's body-mass index (BMI). BMI is an indicator of body fat based on height and weight. Along with students' BMIs, parents receive leaflets describing the health risks of being overweight.

State legislators passed the law in an effort to combat the state's growing childhood obesity problem. A recent study found that 25 percent of the state's high-school students are overweight. The apple, it seems, doesn't fall far from the tree. More than 60 percent of adults in the state also tip the scales. Legislators hope the so-called obesity report cards will prompt parents to help prevent their children from becoming overweight adults.

B Is for Bad

Though many people laud the law, some people say obesity report cards don't make the grade. Critics say the law invades people's privacy and could stigmatize overweight students.

Mary Katherine Smith, a senior at Little Rock's Central High School, weighed in on the matter. "It's not the school's business. You go to school to get an education, not to learn whether you're fat or not. I know I'm probably overweight. I don't need a report card to tell me," she told the Chicago Tribune.

Dr. Nancy Krebs of the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Nutrition thinks obesity report cards don't measure up. "[They're] setting kids up to feel bad about how they are," she said. Instead of focusing on kids' BMIs, schools should provide better health and physical education classes and serve healthier foods, she said.

G Is for Good

Arkansas lawmakers felt they had to do something before they had a big fat problem on their hands. "It's a tough thing being a child who is overweight,

but we have to start somewhere and try to protect our children," said state House Speaker Herschel Cleveland.

Central High senior Grant Ballard said he understands why some people are upset about obesity report cards, but he thinks that might be just what the doctor ordered. "Maybe it'll take getting people mad to motivate them. If you don't get people involved with [this issue] now, the state's going to pay for all these medical problems down the line," he said.

Supporters say the proof is in the pudding. A recent study by doctors in Cambridge, Mass., gave high marks to obesity report cards used in the Boston area. "This study demonstrates that a health report card may be an important tool for schools interested in... motivating parents about their overweight children," said the report.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What did the 2003 anti-obesity law passed in Arkansas require?

- A that all Arkansas students must bring home report cards with A's, B's, C's, D's, or F's for their weight
- B that all Arkansas students must bring home reports with their Body Mass Index number
- C that all Arkansas students who are overweight will have to lose weight
- D that all Arkansas parents have to help their children to lose weight

2. Read these two sentences from the passage.

"Instead of focusing on kids' BMIs, schools should provide better health and physical education classes and serve healthier foods," she said.

"Central High senior Grant Ballard said he understands why some people are upset about obesity report cards, but he thinks that might be just what the doctor ordered."

What is the relationship between these two sentences?

- A The sentences describe two steps in the same process
- B The sentences describe two sides of an argument
- C The first sentence gives the cause of the second
- D The second sentence proves the first one

3. Which of the following conclusions is supported by the passage?

- A Reminding kids that they are overweight is a good way to get them to lose weight.
- B People disagree on the best way to help children to achieve a healthy weight.
- C If schools serve healthier food, all kids will lose weight.
- D The anti-obesity law in Arkansas is a big success.

4. Read the following sentence: "Though many people laud the law, some people say obesity report cards don't make the grade."

In this sentence, the word **laud** means

- A Disagree with
- B praise
- C don't understand
- D disobey

5. The author's purpose in writing this passage was to

- A promote the approach of the Arkansas legislature
- B get kids to lose weight if they had a high body mass index number
- C present arguments for and against the Arkansas law
- D explain what BMI (body mass index) is and why it is important

6. What are two reasons given in the passage for why the Arkansas law is not a good idea?

7. Grant Ballard says "Maybe it'll take getting people mad to motivate them." What might he mean by that?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

This anti-obesity law could make kids feel badly about themselves _____ if they are over the recommended weight.

- A since
- B therefore
- C particularly
- D though

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

In 2003, state legislators passed the law in an effort to combat the state's growing childhood obesity problem.

Who? _____

(did) What? _____

When? in 2003

Why? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** motivate: to inspire someone to do something.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 950

Featured Text Structure: Argumentative: the writer presents evidence for both sides of an argument

Passage Summary: This news debate presents arguments for and against a 2003 anti-obesity Arkansas law that required all students to bring home a Body Mass Index report to their parents. It asks questions, including Does the law invade privacy? Is it effective in fighting obesity? Could it motivate students to lose weight?

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6. What are two reasons given in the passage for why the Arkansas law is not a good idea?

Suggested answer: One reason is that publicizing every students' BMI number sets up kids to feel bad about how they are, as Dr. Nancy Krebs says. Another reason is that it is an invasion of students' privacy – now even people who don't meet them can learn how much they weigh, or if they are overweight. [paragraphs 5,7]

7. Grant Ballard says "Maybe it'll take getting people mad to motivate them." What might he mean by that?

Suggested answer: If people get angry about how many people in Arkansas are overweight, and if they think about how much money it will cost their state if many of those overweight people get sick, it's possible that they will be much more serious about losing weight for themselves and their families. [paragraph 9]

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Who? **state legislators**

(did) What? **passed the law**

When? in 2003

Why? **in an effort to combat the state's growing childhood**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** motivate: to inspire someone to do something.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.