

SPIRIT BAGS

HISTORY, CONCERN, AND CALL FOR CHANGE

To today's Alma Public Schools student, "Spirit Bags" conjure up visions of the basket or bag of candy, cookies, sports drink or pop, and chips that appear in the school office on the day of an academic or sports competition, given either by a special friend, a cheerleader, or a parent. These gifts of goodies are designed to encourage a successful game, match, or other competition, to promote school spirit, and have become sometimes competitive in and of themselves.

Historically, however, the "Spirit Bag" tradition began from totally different roots. It was designed as an effort to replace the meal that may be missed while the competitor was on the way to or after an event. Parents provided drinks, fruit, sandwiches, etc. so that their student would have the nourishment they needed while on the road for a competition.

The sheer size of the "Spirit Bag" has morphed from a lunch bag-sized parcel to a laundry basket, in frequent cases. The contents generally do not assist the student in their competition but, rather, hinder successful performance. Here are some things to ponder before you produce a "Spirit Bag" for your student:

- Hydration is the most important factor in any activity, whether it is an intellectual or a physical endeavor. Water is involved in every body process and is necessary for a clear head, effective reaction time, digestion and absorption of nutrients, body temperature regulation, and energy production.
- Sports drinks, caffeine-containing products, and pop consumed before competition are not recommended. Caffeine actually leads to dehydration. Carbonation and sugar in pop interfere with peak performance. Sports drinks provide electrolytes which need to be replaced after exercise-related depletion, and may be suitable for athletes during exercise of 60 minutes or more duration.
- Simple sugars, such as those found in candy and pop, may cause an energy "burst" that is quickly followed by a rapid drop in blood sugar. When the energy stores are depleted muscles cannot function properly and fatigue sets in. Competitors should eat complex carbohydrates, not the simple sugars found in candy, to fuel them prior to their event- both mentally and physically. Protein and some fats help extend the benefits of the foods eaten before the event.
- If meal replacement is not the reason for your "Spirit Bag," there are other ways to demonstrate your support of the student competitor besides food! Please consider choosing alternative items, such as the ones suggested on the "What's in Your (Spirit) Bag?" flyer.