

Reactions to Commercial Influence in Schools

Many individuals and organizations are working to reduce commercial influence and improve health standards in schools. Following are some success stories.

Seattle, Washington. The Citizen's Campaign for Commercial-Free Schools has made enormous strides in reducing the level of commercialism in Seattle Public Schools by persuading the district to adopt two new policies. The Advertising and Commercial Activities Policy phases out Channel One in middle schools and high schools by June 2005; prohibits advertising on scoreboards, reader boards, athletic fields, and building facades, walls, and floors; and prohibits exclusive "pouring rights" contracts. The Sales of Competitive Foods Policy places restrictions on caffeine, fat, saturated fat, and sugar content of foods, and specifies that vending contracts not include distribution of free products or incentives for increasing students' consumption of foods or drinks.

State of California. In September 1999, the State of California passed AB 116 banning commercial images in public school textbooks. This bill was inspired by a sixth-grade McGraw-Hill math textbook that asked students how much money they needed to save to buy a pair of Nike shoes and used M&Ms to teach fractions. This textbook was state-approved and purchased with taxpayer money. In 2001, the State passed SB 19, which prohibits soda sales and sets nutritional standards for snacks sold in elementary schools (no more than 35% of calories from fat, no more than 10% of calories from saturated fat, no more than 35% sugar by weight) and offers planning grants for middle and high schools that want to institute the standards in their schools.

Oakland, California. Confronted with the sharp rise in obesity and type-2 diabetes in children, in 2002 Oakland School District passed a policy including a ban on the sale of candy, soft drinks, caffeinated beverages, and high-sugar sport drinks in vending machines. This ban applies to all 54,000 elementary, middle, and high school students in the district.

Los Angeles, California. Venice High School applied for a California state grant that helped it eliminate unhealthy snack and beverage sales on campus. After two years, the snack sales per month had almost doubled, from approximately \$6,100 in May 2002 to \$12,000 in March 2004. The school vending machines now offer water, 100% juice, soy milk, and granola and cereal bars. The initiative was spearheaded by a group of students concerned about their school's food selections. With the help of a health teacher, the students became nutrition advocates and began working on strengthening the school's food policy. Students are also involved in fundraisers that do not undermine children's health, such as a celebrity basketball game, car washes, and holiday gift-wrapping.

San Diego County, California. The director of nutrition services for Vista Schools proposed that the district buy its own vending machines and stock them with healthier items. Student taste-tests were conducted to determine what would sell. Vista High School vending machines now contain granola bars, Oriental snack mix, Caesar salads, and tuna. Soda is still available but costs more than juice, milk, or water. The school makes twice as much money as it did with the privately owned machines.

San Francisco, California. In June 1999, the San Francisco school district approved policies that greatly restrict commercialism in schools. The policies require that all long-term corporate sponsorships be approved by the Board of Education and prohibit teachers from using corporate-sponsored education materials, including Channel One. The policies also forbid the school district from entering into district-wide exclusive contracts with soda or snack food companies.

Boston, Massachusetts. In September 2004, Boston Public Schools passed policies eliminating soft drinks in all district schools and placing nutritional requirements on all competitive foods. Juices may be no larger than 12 ounces; milk, no larger than 16 ounces; and snacks, no more than 30% fat (maximum of 7 grams per serving), 10% saturated fat (maximum of 2 grams per serving), or 35% sugar (maximum of 15 grams per serving).

Chicago, Illinois. In April 2004, Chicago Public Schools, the third largest public school district in the nation, announced a ban on soft drinks and junk food in schools. With this decision, the district gave up approximately \$4 million annually in soda revenues. Furthermore, snack food vending machines were banned from elementary and middle schools, and nutritional requirements were placed on snack foods sold in high schools: no more than 30% calories from fat; no more than 10% calories from saturated fat; no more than 40% sugar by weight; no more than 480 mg. of sodium per serving; and at least 5% of the daily value, per serving or per 100 calories, of at least one of these eight essential nutrients: iron, calcium, protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, niacin, thiamine, or riboflavin.¹

New York City, New York. In response to a study, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, that found that 20% of third graders and 21% of sixth graders in New York are obese, the city's Education Department placed a ban on candy, soda, and other minimally nutritious snacks from school vending machines and plans to reduce the fat content in the 800,000 cafeteria meals served in the district daily. Water, 100% juice, and milk may be sold in district schools.

Old Orchard Beach Schools, Maine. With the help of tobacco funds, the schools instituted the Nutrition Team, consisting of members from food service, physical education, administration, and a school nurse, to write new vending machine policies. Soda and junk foods have been removed and replaced with water, 100% fruit juices, and healthier snack options. The vending machine signage was changed to advertise water instead of soda. Vending revenues have remained the same.

School Union 106, Maine. All schools have removed soda and low-nutrition snacks from their machines. Revenue from some machines has increased while that from others has remained the same. The change began when a community nonprofit organization and the school health coordinator made a presentation to the student council (because the council receives vending machine funds). They offered the council healthy snacks and drinks and gave the students examples of schools across the country that had been successful at changing vending. The council was resistant at first. Not until other parties, The Wellness Team, the School Health Advisory Council, and the principal weighed in did the students vote to make the change.

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