

Talking Points for Meetings or Phone Calls

Facts:

- Childhood obesity is an urgent public health threat. Since 1970, obesity rates have quadrupled in children (age 6-11) and tripled in teens (age 12-19), putting children at increased risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, cancer, and diabetes.¹⁻²
- Despite high rates of childhood obesity, many schools sell sugar-sweetened drinks (like soda and sports drinks) and unhealthy snack foods (like chips and cookies) to students through vending machines, stores, cafeteria à la carte lines, and fundraisers.³ These junk foods and sugary drinks are available to students of all ages, especially middle and high school students.
- Schools have a big impact on children's diets – children and teens consume 35 to 50 percent of their total daily calories at school.⁴⁻⁵
- Research shows that students eat less of their lunch, consume more fat, take in fewer nutrients and gain weight when schools sell unhealthy snack foods and beverages outside of meals.⁶
- Schools and school districts across the country are finding that proceeds from selling healthy snacks and beverages and from non-food based fundraisers can fill funding gaps created when junk foods and sugary drinks are limited or banned on campus.⁷
- Several studies have found a significant link between sugary drink consumption and weight gain in children; one study showed that for every additional serving of soft drink consumed per day, the risk of becoming obese increases by 60 percent.^{8,9}

Rationale:

- Students buy and consume fewer unhealthy snack foods and beverages when there are school policies in place to prohibit or restrict the sale of these items in school.¹⁰
- Selling low-nutrition foods in schools sends children the message that good nutrition is not important and conflicts with what children learn in nutrition education. In reality, what students eat and drink is critical to their long-term health and well-being. That's why it's so important for healthy foods and drinks to be available to students throughout the school day.
- Selling junk foods and sugary drinks in vending machines and a la carte lines undermines the recent efforts schools across the country have made to offer healthier school meals.
- It is shortsighted to supplement school budgets at the expense of our children's health. In the long run, we are sure to spend more on diet-related health-care costs than we can raise by selling sugary beverages and junk foods in schools.
- Many assume that schools will lose money if they replace junk foods and sugary drinks with healthier foods and beverages. Research and case studies from schools across the country show that this is not the case.¹¹

Recommendations:

- Schools should work to improve the nutritional quality of foods and beverages sold via vending machines, cafeteria à la carte lines, school stores, fundraisers and other places on campus, including:
 - Offer healthier beverages like low-fat milk, water, and 100% juice and do not allow sports drinks, soda pop, or fruit drinks with added sugar;
 - Limit snacks that are high in calories, saturated and trans fat, and added sugar and low in vitamins and minerals; and
 - Offer healthier snacks like fruits, vegetable, and whole grains.

References

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- ³ Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., Terry-McElrath, Y.M., & Colabianchi, N. School Policies and Practices to Improve Health and Prevent Obesity: National Secondary School Survey Results: School Years 2006–07 through 2009–10. Volume 2. Bridging the Gap Program, Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, Ann Arbor, MI, 2012.
- ⁴ Gleason P, Sutor C. *Food for thought: children's diets in the 1990s*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.; 2001.
- ⁵ Briefel RR, Wilson A, Gleason PM. "Consumption of low-nutrient, energy-dense foods and beverages at school, home, and other locations among school lunch participants and nonparticipants." *J Am Diet Assoc* 2009;109:Suppl-90.
- ⁶ Food Research and Action Center. How Competitive Foods in Schools Impact Student Health, School Meal Programs, and Students from Low-Income Families. June 2010. www.frac.org.
- ⁷ NEA Healthy Futures (formerly NEA Health Information Network). Healthy Rewards: Selling Healthy Snack Foods and Beverages Can be Profitable. November 2012. www.neahealthyfutures.org/bagthejunk.
- ⁸ Malik VS, Willett WC, Hu FB. Sugar-sweetened beverages and BMI in children and adolescents: reanalyses of a meta-analysis. *Am J Clin Nutr*. 2009;89(1):438-439; author reply 439-440.
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- ¹⁰ Chriqui J. issue Brief: Influence of Competitive Food and Beverage Policies on Children's Diets and Childhood Obesity. July 2012. www.healthyeatingresearch.org
- ¹¹ NEA Healthy Futures (formerly NEA Health Information Network). Healthy Rewards: Selling Healthy Snack Foods and Beverages Can be Profitable. November 2012. www.neahealthyfutures.org/bagthejunk.