

# Food Marketing in Schools: Not “Cent\$ible” for School Funding

Food and beverage marketing is ubiquitous in U.S. schools. From scoreboards to vending machines, company logos, brand names, and characters can be found across school campuses. Unfortunately, most of the foods marketed in schools are of poor nutritional quality. A national survey found that 67% of schools have advertising for foods that are high in fat and/or sugar.<sup>1</sup>

In the face of financial constraints, some schools worry that limiting unhealthy food marketing will lead to revenue loss. However, there is no evidence that schools that implement policies to limit unhealthy food marketing experience revenue loss. An issue brief by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Healthy Eating Research and Bridging the Gap programs concluded that the revenue received by allowing companies to market food to children in school is generally minimal, but the long-term consequences of children developing unhealthy dietary preferences and patterns are profound.<sup>2</sup> Luckily, many practical and profitable marketing and fundraising strategies are available.

**Schools Can Continue Marketing and Selling Healthy Foods.** Schools can allow food and beverage marketing if they swap out unhealthy products for healthier ones. For example, instead of featuring Coca-Cola on the front of a vending machine, feature Dasani water.



## \$150 Million...

the amount of money the food industry spent in 2009 on marketing in schools (the latest year for which data are available). Ninety-three percent of those funds were for marketing beverages.<sup>7</sup> The American Beverage Association applauded efforts to reduce unhealthy food marketing in schools, calling them “common-sense efforts” and a “logical next step.”<sup>8</sup>

**Districts Typically Receive Minimal Revenue from Commercial Marketing,** particularly compared to districts’ total budgets. Two-thirds of schools that engage in commercial advertising receive no income at all, and only 0.4% of schools generate more than \$50,000.<sup>3</sup> In addition, more than 82% of schools receive no income from the marketing of products that are of minimal nutritional value or high in fats and sugars.<sup>4</sup> **Nearly 90% of school officials note that school programs and activities would not be reduced if advertisements of unhealthy food ceased.**<sup>1</sup>

**Companies Are Working Toward Decreasing Unhealthy Food Marketing in Schools.** Many companies have already agreed to not market food in elementary schools through the Council of Better Business Bureaus’ Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising

Initiative.<sup>5</sup> In addition, over the past decade, beverage companies have worked with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation to re move full-calorie soft drinks from schools.<sup>6</sup>

# Don't sell us short™

**Local Wellness Policies Must Now Address Food Marketing in Schools.** USDA's 2016 local school wellness policy final rule requires school districts that participate in the school meal programs to include a policy to limit marketing of unhealthy food and beverages (foods and beverages that do not meet the Smart Snacks standards).<sup>9</sup> According to Bridging the Gap, only 14% of local wellness policies address food marketing (as of School Year 2013-14).<sup>10</sup> For more information, go to [schoolwellnesspolicies.org](http://schoolwellnesspolicies.org).

**Practical, Profitable Healthy Fundraising Alternatives Abound.** There are many alternatives to unhealthy food marketing to raise revenue. School districts have had success with healthy fundraisers that are easy to implement and profitable, including walk-a-thons; selling plants, personal care products, and holiday cards; and recycling printer cartridges.<sup>2,11,12</sup>

**Schools Across the Country Are Having Success.** Many schools across the country have switched to healthier marketing and fundraising alternatives without losing revenue. For example, parents and school officials at Williston Junior High School in North Dakota worked with the student council to turn the school's "Candy Cart" into a "Breakfast Cart," stocked with healthier options like "Grip n' Go" milks, 100% juices, and multigrain bars. The school marketed the healthy changes by handing out stickers, flying discs, and pencils as promotional incentives. Sales at the new breakfast cart remained the same as sales with the candy cart, and students now have the opportunity to start the school day with more nutritious options. For more success stories, visit <http://bit.ly/healthyfundraising>.

**How Can States Help?** Technical assistance, training, and materials from state departments of education, agriculture, or health can support local education agencies development of policies to address unhealthy food marketing in schools, including how to maintain or even increase revenue.

For more information, contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at [nutritionpolicy@cspinet.org](mailto:nutritionpolicy@cspinet.org) or Voices for Healthy Kids at [voicesforhealthykids@heart.org](mailto:voicesforhealthykids@heart.org).

## Limiting Food-Related Fundraisers during School Can Increase School Meal Participation and Reimbursements.

It may seem counterintuitive to limit certain fundraisers when seeking to raise school revenue. However, a recent study found that by limiting food fundraisers some schools increased their meal participation, which boosts revenue for the school meal programs.<sup>12</sup> Food fundraisers that take place during school lunch can decrease participation, reducing funding that schools receive not only from paying students, but also reimbursements from USDA. In addition to USDA reimbursements for meals for low-income children, schools receive cash and commodity subsidies for all school meals, including for meals for students who pay for their lunch (\$0.30 in cash for paid meals and \$0.31 worth of commodities for each school lunch in School Year 2016-17).

## Don't Bank on BOOK IT!

Pizza Hut's BOOK IT! program promises to "motivate children to read by rewarding their reading accomplishments with praise, recognition, and pizza." What they don't mention is that a one-topping personal pan pizza can contain at least 600 calories and half a day's worth of saturated fat (11 g) and sodium (1,250 mg).

Westwood Elementary School in Woodstock, IL, found a better way to encourage students to read. They created the "5/10/15 Reading Challenge," which had students find five (5) people to pledge ten (10) dollars for the student to read fifteen (15) minutes per day for a week. For every \$2,000 dollars raised, the principal promised to spend one hour on the building roof reading aloud to students. After a week, the students raised more than \$7,600. (And the Principal spent an entire October morning reading to students from the roof!)

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## References

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