



Talking Points:

Using School Nutrition to Address Obesity

✓ Obesity and Overweight Are Significant Health Problems for America's Youth

- More than 12.5 million children and adolescents ages 2–19 were overweight in 2003–04.¹
- The prevalence of overweight has more than doubled among American children and tripled among adolescents in the past 20 years.²
- Obesity in children is associated with depression, anxiety and more frequent absences from school. One study found obese children and adolescents were four times more likely than their peers to experience “impaired school function,” such as lower grades or more days absent.³
- Being overweight increases a person’s risk of many chronic diseases that can be costly to treat, such as diabetes. The number of children being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, primarily caused by lifestyle and diet, is increasing.
 - For children born in the United States in 2000, the risk of being diagnosed with diabetes at some point in their lives is 39 percent for females and 33 percent for males.
 - By gender, Hispanic boys have the highest lifetime risk of diabetes at 52.5 percent, followed by African-American boys at 49 percent.
 - By gender, Hispanic girls have the highest risk of being diagnosed with diabetes at 45.4 percent, with African-American girls second at 40.2 percent.⁴

✓ Regulations for Competitive Food Vary Greatly Between States

- Although school lunches and breakfasts have to meet certain nutritional guidelines, competitive foods—which are sold in a la carte lines, vending machines or school stores—do not have to meet the same standards.
- Federal regulations prohibit selling “foods of minimal nutritional value” (FMNV) during breakfast and lunch hours in the food service area, the types of foods classified as FMNV are very limited.
 - While regulations limit selling hard candies and soft drinks, they do not cover things such as candy bars, chips or cookies.
- Laws and regulations about what kind of competitive food can be sold and at what times are left up to local school districts, state boards of education or state legislators. While many states follow just the USDA federal guidelines, some have expanded theirs to prohibit any competitive food sales.

✓ Why Legislators Should Care About Competitive Food in Schools

- Almost 90 percent of schools nationally sold competitive food to students in the 2003–04 school year.
- Vending machines were available to students in 91 percent of high schools and 87 percent of middle schools during the 2003–04 school year.⁵
- In one survey of 40 secondary schools in California in 2005, the most commonly purchased competitive foods were chips (30 percent) and candy (22 percent). In general, items that were higher in fat and sugar had lower prices than more healthful items.⁶



Money Concerns Can Influence What Type of Competitive Food Schools Offer

- A la carte sales can provide a significant source of income for school food service programs. Average weekly a la carte revenue at schools participating in the National School Lunch Program was \$375 per 1,000 students for elementary schools, \$1,750 for middle schools and \$1,985 for high schools during the 1998–99 school year.⁷
- During the 2003–04 school year, the 30 percent of high schools that generated the most money from competitive food sales raised more than \$125,000 per school.⁵
- If more healthful options are offered, students will buy them. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention looked at 17 schools and districts from across the country that improved the nutrition of the food offered to students. Twelve made more money and four made the same amount after the changes were implemented.⁸
- Nutrition standards can improve the quality of food and beverages, shift student purchases away from snack meals toward complete meals and increase food service revenue.⁹



What Can State Legislators Do to Improve School Nutrition?

- Work with representatives of the food and beverage industry to offer healthful alternatives to the high-fat and high-sugar snack foods and soft drinks typically offered in school vending machines.
- Consider financial incentives your legislative body could offer school districts, local businesses and farmers to improve the availability of fresh produce and other high-quality foods in schools.
- Link agricultural organizations in the states with schools to promote such initiatives as school-based gardening projects.
- Ensure that all foods and beverages sold or served outside of school meal programs are nutritious.
- Consider ways your state could encourage school districts to include dietitians in decisions about nutrition, such as menus, competitive foods and even fundraising efforts, which often involve students selling candy.
- Work with schools to implement nutrition standards that provide students with healthful choices throughout the school day and school campus that are consistent with and reinforce positive nutrition education messages received in the classroom.

If you would like more information, references, or to explore this topic in greater depth, please:

- send your inquiry to <http://www.healthystates.csg.org/> (keyword: inquiry) or
- call the CSG Health Policy Group at (859) 244–8000.

This Healthy States publication is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, under Cooperative Agreement U38/CCU424348. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. government.

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