
San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco, CA

**K-12 at a Crossroads:
One School's Uncanny Success with Junk-food Ban**

April 4, 2003

Op-Ed Article

Linal Ishibashi, Dana Woldow and Caroline Grannan

<<<>>>

This document is available on the Education Policy Studies Laboratory website at
<http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps/ CERU/Articles/CERU-0304-50-OWI.doc>

San Francisco's Aptos Middle School banished soda sales three months ago. Since then, our "a la carte" student cafe has gradually eliminated the rest of the junk food from the menu and replaced it with healthy choices. Conventional wisdom told us to await both student rebellion and financial disaster. Neither happened.

That same conventional wisdom has frightened schools nationwide away from replacing junk with healthy foods. Those myths harm kids as badly as junk food and soda. Now that we know they're only myths, let's take a hard look at them:

Myth No. 1: Banning soda will cost schools big money.

This supposition overlooks the fact that thirsty students who cannot get soda will buy healthier beverages -- bottled water, 100 percent fruit juice or milk -- if they are available at reasonable cost. When Aptos replaced soda with bottled water in vending machines, sales increased substantially.

Myth No. 2: Soda is not the problem; kids need more exercise.

This is a favorite line of the National Soft Drink Association. Kids do need more exercise -- but drinking soda may put them at higher risk for injuries when they're active. Soda consumption has been clearly linked to increased broken bones, obesity and osteoporosis. A Harvard School of Public Health study found that physically active teenage girls who were soda drinkers were three times more likely to break bones than their teammates who shunned carbonated drinks. For cola drinkers, the risk was five times greater, according to the study (Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine,

June 2000). For these girls, getting more exercise without cutting down on cola could be downright dangerous.

Myth No. 3: Soft drink companies help schools by donating scoreboards, uniforms and equipment.

The soft drink companies help themselves by building brand loyalty among kids, emblazoning their logos on those free scoreboards. Adequate school funding is the government's responsibility; that's one of the reasons we pay taxes.

Myth No. 4: Kids won't buy healthy foods from vending machines.

Not true. A study published in the January 2001 American Journal of Public Health showed that price was the deciding factor. Researchers at the University of Minnesota tested healthy and unhealthy options in vending machines in schools and workplaces. Students, just like adults, were likely to prefer healthy selections if they cost less than unhealthy offerings.

Myth No. 5: Banning soda sales violates kids' right to free choice.

This argument disregards the fact that students are free to choose alternatives such as juice, water, milk or seltzer, or to bring soft drinks from home. Meanwhile, all talk about kids' right to choose ceases when school districts sign exclusive "pouring rights" contracts. These agreements give one company (usually Coca-Cola or Pepsi) the exclusive right to sell their products on school property, with all competitors' products banned. Districts desperate for money are persuaded to sign away this supposed "right to choose." Then the winning soft drink company actively participates in limiting the kids' "choice" -- to its own products.

LEARN MORE

For a free guide on how to ban junk food from schools, and for more information on healthy school food, check out the Web site www.pasasf.org.

Linal Ishibashi is principal of Aptos Middle School in San Francisco. **Dana Woldow** is an Aptos parent and chair of the Food Sales Subcommittee of the San Francisco Unified School District School Nutrition and Physical Fitness Advisory Committee. **Caroline Grannan** is an Aptos parent and a vice president of the San Francisco PTA, 2nd District of the California State PTA.

##