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**Vallas Has the Right Idea in Expelling Sodas and Snacks From  
School Buildings**

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**Editorial**

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Are soda pops a terrible thing?

Well, no. Just imagine the innocent pleasure of sipping an icy (insert favorite cola brand name) on your porch this steamy evening.

But do sodas belong in schools? The answer again is no. Though not on a scale with underage smoking and alcohol consumption, sodas do their own insidious damage to the young.

Packed with nutrition less sugar and calories, they contribute to obesity and diabetes in this country, both of which are rising at an alarming rate. It's a fair bet that given the choice at school between a can of soda and a carton of milk, a child won't end up with a white mustache.

It's commendable then that Paul Vallas, the chief executive of Philadelphia's public school system, declared Tuesday that he will push to ban the sale of sodas in the district.

His anti-soda announcement comes just as school districts nationwide - literally, from Los Angeles to New York - are banning sodas and working in other ways to improve school nutrition.

It also comes just as the School Reform Commission is considering awarding an exclusive beverage vending contract for the next several years.

Though Philadelphia Coca-Cola Bottling Co. and the Pepsi Bottling Group are said to be the chief bidders, today's wide product diversification approach means that

both companies (Pepsi with Aquafina and Tropicana, Coke with Dasani and a variety of juice drinks) needn't sell another can of soda in the schools to profit.

Let it be said, though, that even if vendors sold only the healthiest drinks, something is bothersome about a poor district offering a commercial vending deal to help pay its bills. Keep in mind it's the quarters and dollars from many poor students that feed those machines.

In a world with proper priorities, schools wouldn't have to turn to soda or snack sales to raise needed money. But in the real world, they do. So the main concern is what product will be sold.

Since Philadelphia and other districts have the power to choose what is sold in their schools, they should keep it healthy and simple: Water, 100-percent fruit juices, or fruit drinks with no less than 25 percent fruit content.

And if the soda ban seems impractical, consider: Out of about 700 vending machines in Philadelphia schools and administrative buildings, only 116 dispense soda in common areas, and only in middle and high schools.

So imposing a soda ban should be an easy decision when the reform commission acts on Vallas' recommendation. A public hearing on the issue is promised later this month.

Next step, healthier school food and snacks in general. Vallas promises to pursue this mission energetically, too, looking toward the model in New York - which recently banned all vended soda, candy, sugary snacks and went on a fat-content reducing binge in its cafeteria.

So think of sending Vallas and the reform commission boxes of chocolates when they do the right thing.

Make that apples instead.