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**School Board Limits Soft Drinks for Middle-Schoolers**

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Soft-drink sales to middle-school students will be banned before and during school hours after a divided Seattle School Board voted last night to extend the district's contract with Coca-Cola, but with several stipulations.

Under the new contract, Coca-Cola must reserve three slots in each of its vending machines for water and 100-percent fruit juice. The board also has the right to cancel the five-year contract, which would give the district some leeway in the event of lawsuits or a possible state law banning junk food.

High-school students would continue to have access to cola vending machines during school hours.

The agreement struck last night came after weeks of debate, a lawsuit threat and complaints by many parents concerned that the sugar-laden drinks may contribute to childhood obesity and diabetes.

George Washington University law professor John Banzhaf III, who opposes school districts' contracts with soft-drink manufacturers, said in a telephone interview last night that the School Board's compromise doesn't go far enough and that a lawsuit is still possible.

Banzhaf, a driving force behind lawsuits that have cost tobacco companies billions of dollars, said he will assist any Seattle attorney who wants to sue the district.

The nation's two largest school districts — New York and Los Angeles — have banned soft-drink sales, while Portland, Puyallup and Tacoma have reaffirmed Coke sales.

Rarely has this School Board been so divided as in this 4-3 vote, with board members Nancy Waldman, Dick Lilly and Mary Bass opposing extending the contract.

Board President Waldman, who supported the Coke deal five years ago, had a change of heart. "I don't like the fact that the schools are providing an unhealthy drink to kids," she said. "Even if we had a milk and a Coke machine, they would choose Coke."

Waldman said her daughter, a Roosevelt High student, had pleaded for her to support the contract because the school needs the money. Coke's exclusive "pouring rights" contract would generate \$345,000 next school year for middle and high schools' academic and after-school activities.

State Sen. Jeanne Kohl-Welles, D-Seattle, who last week had asked the School Board to ban soda sales, said she wished the board had been stricter but understood the compromise, given the district's financial problems.

Also last night, the board adopted a slimmed-down budget that will cut 193 jobs and result in an overhaul of the district's management structure.

The \$437 million budget is about \$6 million less than last school year's spending plan, with the central office taking the biggest hit — a \$17 million reduction — to ease the impact on classrooms. Many senior-level jobs were eliminated, including directors and managers who oversee bilingual, honors and physical-education programs.

"All these people are very experienced administrators. Our members aren't going to have the support that they have had before," said John Dunn, president of the Seattle Education Association.

The district plans to delegate those responsibilities to lower-level staffers.

In light of the district's recent budget problems and sloppy bookkeeping, school officials acknowledged their credibility was at stake and said this is a balanced budget, based on conservative estimates.

"This is a budget that people can trust. I can assure you that," said interim Superintendent Raj Manhas. "This budget has been looked at by so many people and from so many angles."