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A Well-Rounded Education

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Last year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that obesity in kids ages 6 to 19 has tripled in the last two decades, American kids aren't just getting fatter; they're getting sicker because they're overweight. A 2002 review of child-obesity studies, published in the British journal *The Lancet*, found that obesity in childhood causes serious medical conditions more often associated with adults, such as type 2 diabetes and hypertension,

Eating too much of the wrong kinds of foods is clearly a major cause of these problems, (See our cover story; "Cut the Fat: page 12.) Yet soft-drink manufacturers and junk-food vendors are being allowed to target schools as a way to capture the minds, money; and mouths of young shoppers, Corporate involvement has its place in education, But there's a big difference between donating computers for philanthropic reasons and signing "pouring contracts," for example, in which companies agree to pay tens of thousands of dollars for the exclusive right to stock vending machines and sell their products at school events, The Charleston County, S,C" school district signed a five-year contract valued at \$8,1 million with The Pepsi Bottling Group, Pepsi's profit? A lot more than lunch money.

Few states have laws that govern these relationships, so it's left to school districts to use their best judgment As we've seen, however, their best may not be good enough, Consumers Union urges parents to challenge school administrators and food manufacturers, Insist that the foods and beverages sold to children at school emphasize nutritious choices, that parents are consulted before marketing agreements are signed, and that any agreements enhance, not undermine, children's health, For examples of model guidelines and other information developed by school districts, states, and groups of educators, go to www.schoolcommercialism.org. That's the Web site of the Commercialism in Education Research Unit at Arizona State University, a program supported by CD. Children, after all, deserve our protection.

