
Parents Advocating School Accountability, San Francisco, CA

Junk Food Off the Menu at San Francisco Schools

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Press Release

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<http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps1/CERU/Articles/CERU-0402-199-OWI.doc>

San Francisco schools have completed phasing in a bold new plan that may be the nation's most comprehensive healthy-food policy – a “no empty calories” standard for all foods sold to students during school.

The San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) policy not only sets maximum levels for fat and sugar, but also requires a certain level of nutrients in all snack foods and side dishes sold at every school, kindergarten through 12th grade. Snacks and side dishes are second only to soda as the most common source of empty calories in the typical student's diet.

The new policy is a response to soaring rates of childhood obesity and related disorders. Researchers predict that those maladies will make the current generation of children the first in human history to live shorter lifespans than their parents' generation.

School districts across the nation are reexamining their food sales policies, and a number have banished soda sales and other junk food. Schools make money from selling soda and unhealthy food to kids, and some administrators worry about the loss of income if they cut off the supply. “But many districts are getting the message: You can't put a price on children's health,” said Dana Woldow, parent co-chair of the San Francisco Unified School District committee that devised the new policy.

Also, Woldow pointed out, the SFUSD policy has been tested at one school, Aptos Middle School, since January 2003. Food-service profits at Aptos rose after the junk food was removed. “People forget that kids will buy other items if they can't get junk,” she noted. Other benefits at Aptos included less litter in the yard and better behavior after lunch – and the school's test scores rose.

SFUSD began phasing in the new standards districtwide in fall 2003, moving toward the goal of fully implementing the policy by mid-January 2004. As the second semester began in January, the final frontier – vending machines – was required to meet the standards.

The policy does not affect the federally subsidized National School Lunch Program (NSLP) – the familiar lunch line, where foods served out by “cafeteria ladies” must already meet U.S. Department of Agriculture nutritional standards. But as in almost every school district, many parallel food operations have appeared over the years. The snack bars, vending machines and student stores outside the NSLP offered an array of junk food, from soda to chips to Slim Jim processed meat sticks to breaded and deep-fried items.

A new California law, SB677, eliminates soda sales in public schools, kindergarten through 8th grade. The San Francisco policy goes further by addressing unhealthy foods as well as soda, and by extending through 12th grade. Another recent California law, SB19, attempted to set healthy food standards at schools, but lack of funding means it goes unenforced and is essentially toothless. In any case, the San Francisco standard sets more comprehensive standards than SB19.

The SFUSD policy was implemented in response to a January 2003 resolution by the district’s Board of Education. SFUSD serves about 59,000 students.

Summary of the new SFUSD food standards

The only beverages approved for sale are plain bottled water, 100% fruit juice, blends of 100% fruit juice and water with no added sweetener, and lowfat (1%) or nonfat milk. No soda, iced tea, Gatorade, fruit punch.

Entrees must contain no more than 30% calories from fat, no more than 10% calories from saturated and trans fat, and be no more than 35% sugar by weight. Snacks and side dishes must meet the above standard, plus must contain specified levels of vitamins, minerals, protein, and fiber. There are limits on portion sizes. Only snacks and side dishes on a frequently updated district list may be sold.

Principals and staff will promote a school environment supportive of healthy eating. Adults are encouraged to model healthy eating by serving nutritious food at school meetings and events, and by refraining from using candy and snacks of minimal nutritional value as rewards for students.

All food sold during the school day must meet nutritional standards. Federal breakfast, lunch, and snack programs must meet U.S. Department of Agriculture standards. All other food sold must meet the SFUSD Nutritional Standard, which is stricter; this standard applies to snack bars, vending machines, student stores and fundraising sales.

Comparison of different school systems' healthy food policies

Philadelphia

Takes effect June 30, 2004.

Beverages allowed: water, milk, 100% fruit juice; sports drinks allowed in high school athletic areas. Students can bring soft drinks from home No policy yet on junk food, but that is expected next.

<http://www.philly.com/mld/philly/living/health/7714466.htm>

New York City

Took effect September 2003.

Beverages allowed: water, milk, 100% fruit juice (exclusive contract with Snapple, which sells juice in 16 oz bottles.) Snack foods in vending machines: no hard candy, doughnuts, or cakes, but some kinds of lower fat/lower salt chips and lower fat cookies allowed.

<http://www.cce.cornell.edu/farmtoschool/nyc.pdf>

Los Angeles

Took effect January 2004.

Beverages allowed: water, milk, fruit juice containing at least 50% juice, sports drinks. Restricts beverages sold from before school until ½ hour after the end of school, at all sites accessible to students. Non-allowed beverages can be sold for fundraising beginning ½ hour after the end of school, if vending machines, cafeterias, and student stores are not used to do the selling.

http://www.agr.state.tx.us/foodnutrition/database/article/2003/Dec2003/SS/LAUSD_Healthy_Beverage_Resolution.doc

Los Angeles beverage policy:

Junk food: effective July 2004.

Junk food must meet SB19 guidelines; school meals must include a vegetarian option; salad bars mandated at all high schools within 2 years and all elementary schools within 6 years; name-brand fast-food vendors must be eliminated within 3 years.

<http://www.communitynutrition.org/nov.12.03.htm>

Oakland, Calif.

Took effect March 2002.

Beverages: no soda, iced tea, or sports drinks in vending machines. Also banned: candy (no mention of other junk foods). Ban in effect at all times on school grounds, and applies to athletic events and fundraising

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2002/01/16/FD199328.DTL>

Texas

Began 2002-2003 school year.

Bans the sale of soda and other items on the USDA's Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV) list (a short list of all-sugar candies, candy-coated popcorn and gum) during mealtimes in any part of a school (federal law prohibits the sale of FMNV in cafeterias during mealtimes). The FMNV list does not include other high-sugar or high-fat items such as chocolate bars or chips.

<http://www.commercialalert.org/TXfood.htm>