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Policy Brief **3**

Food Fundraising at School

California youth, like their peers across the country, continue to face a nutrition and physical activity crisis. Today's youth generally fail to meet the 2000 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* that recommend children two years and older eat a diet which is low in fat, sugar, and sodium, and high in fruit, vegetables, and whole grains. The 2000 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* also recommend that children two years and older be physically active at least one hour each day. However, a California study found that only two percent of teenagers met all five diet and activity recommendations. ⁽¹⁾ Among children in grades five, seven, and nine who were tested with California's mandated physical fitness test in 2003, 75 percent failed to meet the state's minimum fitness standards and more than one-quarter were overweight. ⁽²⁾

Schools play a significant role in providing food to children and in shaping children's acquisition of lifetime dietary habits. In a 2003 study of California high schools, more than 70 percent of the responding districts reported selling pizza, chips, cookies, and soda a la carte (sold outside the federal reimbursable meal program). In comparison, there was only one healthy item (fruit) that was sold a la carte by over 70 percent of responding districts. ⁽³⁾

Fundraising at School

As budgets shrink, school officials are faced with tough financial decisions to preserve activities such as athletics and student clubs. Fundraising to support these activities is quite common, and often involves the sale of food or soft drinks to students on campus. In a national survey, 82 percent of schools reported clubs, sports teams, and/or the PTA sold food at school or in the community to raise money. ⁽⁴⁾

It is extremely difficult to assess the volume and revenue of unhealthy food fundraising. A set of interviews with principals described food fundraising as fast, easy, and a way to increase the variety of food items sold to students. However, many principals did not have a firm accounting of how much money was being raised, nor where the funds were being spent. ⁽⁵⁾

In a survey of high school food service directors, two important issues emerged regarding school fundraisers: 1) school fundraisers compete with food service during meal times, and 2) food service does not have control over the types of foods sold by school-related organizations for fundraisers. In fact, 74 percent of respondents said student clubs sell foods during mealtimes. ⁽³⁾

Fundraising decisions are primarily at the discretion of school officials. Principals participating in a 2001 interview demonstrated a limited understanding of the regulations surrounding competitive foods from "not being aware of any restrictions" to feeling the regulations were "too numerous to describe." ⁽⁵⁾

Federal regulations (7CFR 210.11 and 220.12) mandate districts participating in the national school lunch and school breakfast programs establish rules or regulations to control the sale of foods in competition with the meal programs.

California has established limits on the number of times student organizations can sell food items on campus and on the number of different types of food items they can sell. ⁽⁶⁾ Even with these regulations, there appears to be an increasing amount of competitive food sales on campus, and a wide range of knowledge and enforcement of existing regulations.

A General Accounting Office Report on Commercialism in Schools identified product sales (primarily soft drinks) as the most common and lucrative opportunities for generating revenue. ⁽⁷⁾

Impact on Student Health

Food fundraisers are concerning because they directly compete with the foodservice department and are usually not subject to any nutrient regulations. The tremendous increase in foods high in fat, sugar, and calories on school campuses is partially contributing to the emerging obesity

crisis. It is not uncommon for a student to choose food items from a fundraiser, rather than from the federally regulated school meal program, which has established criteria for nutrients important for growth, development, and cognitive function.

Can Money be Generated Other Ways?

Despite financial concerns, many school districts are using healthier food fundraising alternatives:

- Sequoia Middle School in Fresno, CA, banned junk food from its campus. The school snack bar is now stocked with juices, pretzels, and popcorn. Sales have increased among students.
- Vista Unified School District, CA, overhauled its vending program and now offers items such as bagels and cream cheese, yogurt and granola, salads, fresh fruit, trail mix, nuts, and dried fruit. The district reduced the availability of soda to only 20 percent of vending slots. The first year of the change generated \$200,000 more in sales than the previous year.
- North Community High School in Minneapolis, MN, replaced most of its soda vending machines with machines stocked with 100 percent fruit and vegetable juices and water. Prices for healthy snack options were slightly reduced. As a result, the sale of healthier items increased and the school has not lost money.
- A middle school and high school in Philadelphia, PA, changed their vending machines beverage contents to include only 100 percent juice products, 25 percent juice products, and water. The average monthly revenue from the machines increased.

Fundraising ideas that have generated between \$1,000 and \$500,000

- **Auction:** solicited businesses for donations including timeshares and furniture
- **Brick sale with engraved donor names:** bricks for a new walkway each sold for \$50
- **Spring Clean Up:** Soccer players worked for 3 1/2 days each helping community members with home projects. Players charged about \$10 per hour.
- **Non-food Sales:** Items like Scrip, plants, gift wrap, and magazines are sold by many groups.

Citation: www.fund-raising.com/ideabank.html

Promising Policy Directions

Eliminate the sale of unhealthy foods and beverages as fundraisers.

1. Apply the nutrition standards enacted in the Pupil Nutrition, Health, and Achievement Act of 2001 (Chapter 913, Statutes of 2001, Escutia) (SB 19) and the California Childhood Obesity Prevention Act (Chapter 415, Statutes of 2003, Ortiz) (SB 677) to all foods and beverages sold as fundraisers at all California elementary, middle, and high schools.
2. Clarify and strengthen existing competitive food regulations as to when, where, and what are appropriate fundraising activities.

References

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