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Groups Fight Over Soda in High Schools

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The ink isn't dry on the state's proposed healthy-food standards for public elementary and middle schools, and groups are already picking sides in the anticipated fight over a similar policy for high schools.

State superintendent Tom Horne and Rep. Mark Anderson, R-Mesa, said Tuesday that they intend to spearhead legislation in January that would extend the ban on soft drinks to high schools.

High schools were originally included in legislation that passed this year to ban junk food from elementary and middle schools, but got taken out of the final version after heavy opposition from the food and beverage industry.

Despite Horne's best efforts to diffuse that opposition before the bill is introduced, the state beverage association said its members will put up a fight.

The Arizona Beverage Association released a school vending policy Tuesday that promotes a variety of drink choices for high school students, including retaining at least half of the slots in high school vending machines for regular soda and half for nutritious and "low-calorie beverages."

"I think the beverage people have seen the handwriting on the wall, and all around the country they are really trying to scramble and get out in front of this," said Anderson, who sponsored the original bill last year.

Horne said the beverage association's policy was "close to what would be acceptable to me." He said he would agree to keep diet soft drinks in high schools if the association would stop serving sugary soft drinks.

"If we could reach a compromise, we could avoid a fight at the Legislature," Horne said.

The president of the Arizona Beverage Association said thanks, but no thanks.

"We appreciate Tom Horne's recognition that diet soft drinks can be a part of a healthy diet," said John Kalil, the association's president "(But) that policy is too restrictive in a high school setting."

The association plans to take its fight to the Legislature after Anderson introduces the new bill.

"We also believe diet or reduced-calorie soft drinks have a place in junior high schools as well," Kalil added.

But that battle is largely over. Details are still being worked out on the state's new school nutrition law, which goes into effect July 1, but no one is backing off the ban on carbonated beverages in the state's middle schools.

The state has published more than 20 pages of recommended standards that include "allowed" and "unallowed" foods, which initially raised concerns among some school district nutrition directors.

The Glendale Elementary district's director of food service, Barry Leimkuehler said Horne and his staff assuaged many of those concerns in a meeting Tuesday afternoon with about 60 school food service directors, vendors and manufacturers.

Leimkuehler said the Department of Education representatives told food directors there weren't good foods and bad foods, but foods that would meet the standards.

If foods meet the state's standards, such as getting 30 percent or less of their calories from fat, schools can serve them, Leimkuehler said, which is what many district administrators were asking for.

"Everybody was thrilled to have the meeting. The level of understanding was definitely much higher than when we went in," he said.

Parents still have a role in this, too, Horne said, until the comment period closes on Oct. 25. "We really are welcoming comment and don't want people to view this as anything but the most preliminary draft," he said.

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Permitted:

Kellogg's Blueberry Nutri-Grain Cereal Bar (37 grams)

* Calories: 140

* Total fat: 3 grams

* Sugars: 13 grams

* Total carbohydrates: 26 grams

Not Permitted:

Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bar (43 grams)

* Calories: 230

* Total fat: 13 grams

- * Sugars: 22 grams
- * Total carbohydrates: 25 grams

Permitted:

Quaker Chewy Chocolate Chip Granola Bar (28 grams)

- * Calories: 120
- * Total fat: 4 grams
- * Sugars: 9 grams
- * Total carbohydrates: 20 grams

Not Permitted:

Kellogg's Krave Chocolate Snack Bar (48 grams)

- * Calories: 200
- * Total fat: 6 grams
- * Sugars: 21 grams
- * Total carbohydrates: 30 grams

Permitted:

Doritos Light Nacho Cheesier (28 grams or about 11 chips)

- * Calories: 90
- * Total fat: 1 gram
- * Sugars: 1 gram
- * Total carbohydrates: 18 grams

Not Permitted:

Doritos Nacho Cheesier (28 grams or about 11 chips)

- * Calories: 140
- * Total fat: 7 grams
- * Sugars: 2 grams
- * Total carbohydrates: 17 grams

Source: Product Web sites

What could be banned:

- * Carbonated beverages, including diet soft drinks.
- * Candy such as jawbreakers, Jolly Rancher, bubble gum, Runts, gummy bears, etc.
- * Pastries, including doughnuts, croissants, sweet rolls, cinnamon rolls, bear claws and cupcakes.
- * Fruit drinks with less than 100 percent juice.
- * Rice Krispies Treats, licorice, Cracker Jack.

What would be OK:

- * Pure water and 100 percent juice.
- * Milk, 1 percent fat or less.
- * Ice cream (low-fat only and not more than 3 ounces.)
- * Chex mix (limit on portion size).
- * Baked potato chips that meet fat, calorie, portion size requirements.

- * Microwave popcorn, 94 percent fat-free
- * Certain low-fat cereal bars as well as Kellogg's Pop-Tarts in certain flavors.
- * Certain nuts, seeds, yogurt, beef jerky (portion size limit).

Nutrition standards:

- * 30 percent or less of total calories from fat (except seeds and nuts).
- * 10 percent or less of total calories from fat.
- * No more than 35 percent total sugar by weight (except dairy, fruits and vegetables).
- * At least 1 gram of fiber (except dairy products).
- * Maximum 300 calories per serving.

Source: Arizona Department of Education