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Commercialism in Education Research Unit

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

**from the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU)
and the Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL)
at Arizona State University**

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Find this document on the web at:

<http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps1/CERU/Documents/EPSL-0307-105-CERU.doc>

Opposition Grows as Schoolhouse Commercialism Flourishes and Schoolchildren's Health Declines

Tempe, Ariz.—*School Commercialism, Student Health, and the Pressure To Do More With Less*, a report released today by the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU), finds that while the health of schoolchildren continues to decline, corporations are targeting schools to advertise and sell products that are profitable but not necessarily the most healthful.

Professor Alex Molnar (Arizona State University), report author and CERU director, explains that the increasing political and economic pressure on schools to boost student performance and to find external resources to fund school programs pushes schools to turn to corporations for help, thus encouraging school commercialism.

Child Obesity Epidemic

Molnar points out that research has identified a relationship between the consumption of sugar sweetened drinks and child obesity. As soft drink consumption has increased so too has child obesity. In October 2002, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that obesity in children has tripled in the last two decades. In addition, according to 1999-2000 data, 15 percent of children and teenagers (9 million) ages 6 to 19 were overweight. In addition, soft drink consumption has more than doubled in the past 30 years.

Schools' Dilemma: Money or Health

Despite studies linking junk food and soft drinks with obesity, many schools, in need of new resources, have turned a blind eye toward corporate advertising or even embraced it. Rather than promoting healthy choices, Molnar notes, exclusive agreements with bottlers, for example, force school districts to increase the number of vending machines in schools in order to increase sales. Evidence also suggests that commercializing trends in schools is not likely to abate in the future.

Opposition

School districts, teachers, parents, and policy makers have begun to look critically at corporate marketing and its impact on children's health. The report identifies 30 pieces of legislation and three resolutions proposed between 1999 and 2003 at the federal and state level that specifically addressed health related schoolhouse commercialism issues.

Litigation

Concerned parents as well as businesses harmed by exclusive access to schools may increasingly turn to the courts for relief. The report notes two lawsuits filed in 2003: one in New York by a beverage association and taxpayers against the state education commissioner, and the other by an Oregon parent against his child's school district.

Conclusion

As recently as 20 years ago, there was a broad national consensus that public education should be free of commercial pressure on students. As this report has documented, however, the pressure on schools to permit a broad array of marketing activities is now intense and pervasive.

The Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) conducts research, disseminates information, and helps facilitate a dialogue between the education community, policy makers, and the public at large about commercial activities in schools. CERU is the only national academic research center dedicated to schoolhouse commercialism.

Visit the CERU website at <http://schoolcommercialism.org/>

The Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) at Arizona State University offers high quality analyses of national education policy issues and provides an analytical resource for educators, journalists, and citizens. It includes the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU), the Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA), the Education Policy Reports Project (EPRP), the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU), and the Language Policy Research Unit (LPRU).

The EPSL is directed by ASU Professor Alex Molnar.

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