

IMPROVING SCHOOL FOOD STANDARDS: THE POSITIVE IMPACT ON REVENUE

NEW FINDINGS

A review of four research studies and three state-based reports published in the March 2008 *Journal of School Health*¹ found that:

- **Selling snack foods that meet improved nutrition standards did not result in revenue loss in 6 out of 7 studies cited.** Also known as “competitive foods,” such snacks are sold in school vending machines and on a la carte lines.
- **There was increased participation in the National School Lunch Program after healthier competitive foods were introduced.** This brings additional dollars to the schools and can compensate for revenue loss coming from other areas.
- **Some school revenue from competitive foods *increased* after improved nutrition standards were implemented,** according to other anecdotal evidence.²

BACKGROUND

- Competitive food sales significantly reduce the amount of vegetables, fruits, and milk consumed by children at school lunches.³ In contrast, students in schools which restrict access to foods high in fat and sugar consume less of those substances.⁴
- The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act of 2004 mandated that by 2006 every school receiving federal school meal reimbursements will have implemented a *Wellness Policy* which, among other requirements, must address nutrition standards for all foods sold on school campuses.
- Advocates of improved school nutrition say it is wrong to sell unhealthy products to children to subsidize their education, and emphasize that school policies should fully support a healthy diet for school children.

BARRIERS to IMPROVING SCHOOL FOODS

- School administrators are reluctant to improve the nutrition standards for competitive foods, fearing that children will be uninterested in “healthier” items and that this lack of interest will result in a loss of revenue.
- Schools argue that the economic realities of rising food prices and other costs necessitate the sale of competitive foods that appeal to children, regardless of nutritional content.

POLICY OPPORTUNITIES

Improve nutrition standards for ALL foods sold on school campuses in the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act of 2009. This would include federal breakfast and lunch programs as well as competitive foods sold in vending machines and school stores, on a la carte lines, and for fundraisers. Apply them to the entire campus for the whole school day.

Increase the reimbursement rate for the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs to offset rising food costs, which can threaten advances made in nutrition standards for feeding programs and competitive foods.

References

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4. Neumark-Sztainer D, French SA, Jannan PJ, Story M, Fulkerson JA. School lunch and snacking patterns among high school students: associations with school food environment and policies. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act*. 2005;2(1):14.