



Controlling Junk Food and the Bottom Line Tip Sheet

Improving Access to Healthy Foods and Beverages Through Healthier Competitive Foods Standards

Tip Sheet 3 of 5: Replacing junk food in the cafeteria • Increasing access to healthy vending • Improving foods in fundraising and celebrations. Full set of tip sheets available online at iphionline.org/center-for-policy-and-partnerships/controlling-junkfood-and-the-bottom-line.

Implementation of the new Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards provides an opportunity to offer healthier competitive foods--snacks and à la carte foods and beverages--in schools. This tip sheet, *Improving Access to Healthy Foods and Beverages Through Healthier Competitive Foods Standards*, is one of five tip sheets that share strategies, best practices, and tips from middle schools and high schools in eight districts across the country that participated in the *Controlling Junk Food and the Bottom Line* study in 2012. These districts have improved nutrition standards for competitive foods without experiencing significant financial losses. This document focuses on strategies for improving access to food and beverage items both during school and through after-school activities.

Reducing access to less healthy foods and increasing access to healthier foods are more successful with approaches that work together. This tip sheet gives strategies for addressing the foods that are available in a variety of times and places in the school. Districts in the study agreed that improving foods and beverages served in the cafeteria was critical, but that simultaneously changing the options in vending machines and foods used for fundraising and celebrations was also vital to students' receiving consistent messages on school grounds about healthy eating.

"There's that period of time when there's a little bit of grumbling, but after people get used to the changes, it just seems like the norm."

Joan Knoll, District Dietician, Bismarck Public Schools, North Dakota

WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?

Access to Healthy Foods and Beverages

Replacing junk food in the cafeteria

Most districts simultaneously worked to improve their reimbursable school meal programs and their competitive food environment. Some actively promoted participation in free and reduced-price meals in order to maximize their meal participation and generate revenue to offset any losses in competitive foods. Gail Sharry, food service director for New London Public Schools in Connecticut, shared that at the middle school level, revenues from competitive foods fell slightly, but the district's financial wellbeing isn't based on competitive food sales. They knew revenues would be good if students all took a meal. Sharry said, "We grew our participation to about 90 percent...when I first got here...some of the schools were under 70 percent."

A few common strategies that were found across districts for increasing consumption of healthy foods in the cafeteria included salad bars and placement of fruits and veggies near the beginning of the line. One innovative policy in Mississippi, where Jackson Public Schools are located, was to only allow the purchase of snacks with the purchase of a meal. Most of the districts also emphasized the critical role of student and family engagement through taste testing and enhanced nutrition education. More information on these student engagement strategies is included in Tip Sheet 4 on *Student Education and Engagement*.

Most schools made changes incrementally, and some found that making replacements of healthy for unhealthy foods at the beginning of a school year normalized the healthier choices more easily.

Several districts also reported that vendors who already have expertise in providing healthier products that meet nutrition standards and preparing them in appealing ways can be helpful partners in efforts to replace junk food in the cafeteria.

Increasing access to healthy products in vending and à la carte lines

Four of eight food service directors reported that their district had exclusive contracts prior to implementing stronger nutrition standards, but only two reported that their district still had an exclusive contract following implementation of stronger nutrition standards for competitive foods and beverages. This change in contracting provided the districts with more flexibility in stocking vending machines and à la carte items. Districts reported working closely with vending companies to find products that met healthier nutrition standards, and that the availability of products steadily increased as more and more districts across the country sought healthier options. The research team anticipates that this trend will continue as stronger competitive food standards are implemented nationwide.

Corvallis School District 509J in Oregon worked closely with vendors to find creative ways to sell healthier food and beverage items to students, including efforts to use attractive packaging, provide the most current products, and keeping a variety of options available. Food Service Director Sharon Gibson shared, *"We go to a lot of food shows to find out what's new. New products always sell right off the bat."*

A number of districts, including Marshall County Schools in Alabama, reported success in turning off machines during meal times. Bismarck Public Schools in North Dakota took it a step further and worked to reduce unhealthy foods available in vending machines during after-school programs.

Schools and districts used various marketing techniques to promote an improved selection of healthier vending options, and some vendors stepped up as partners in those marketing efforts. For example, Marshall County Schools removed images of unhealthy beverages from the vending machines and replaced them with images of water. More information on these marketing strategies is included in Tip Sheet 5 on Improving Cafeteria Strategies.

Improving foods in fundraising and celebrations

Although the new USDA Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards do not require changes to foods served at celebrations or in fundraising activities outside the school day, many schools and districts have found improving foods in these settings to be an important part of a comprehensive approach to improving student nutrition.

In Perry County School District in Alabama, the district adopted a policy for more nutritious foods in classroom celebrations. The district gives each school the flexibility to develop procedures tailored to the school's needs. Food Service Director Joyce Banks shared that parents *"were reluctant at first to accept this, [but] they soon got on board because they know it is not allowed in the schools."*

Several schools also reported replacing some rewards and celebrations with activities that don't involve food at all. For example, Principal Eric Beasley, from Linus Pauling Middle School in Corvallis, Oregon, described: *"We've found other creative ways, we'll sometimes have special games on Fridays, we'll have a hat day, we have other kinds of celebrations...instead of just giving kids junk food for good behavior."*

Most districts in the study were still in the process of working on nutrition standards for fundraisers and after-school events, reporting that these are more challenging areas to get buy-in and proper enforcement. The financial impact of healthier nutrition standards for extracurricular activities and fundraising was mixed. Declines in sales were reported by one of the food service directors and three of the principals, but most of the schools either did not have data or had not yet implemented nutrition standards for before- and after-school activities.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools applied many of the fundraising ideas and resources available through Alliance for a Healthier Generation. Fundraisers have included selling school supplies, hosting a weekly Farmer's Market with proceeds going to the parent teacher associations (PTAs), and bottling and selling herb-infused vinegars using herbs from the school garden. Some PTAs followed the district's lead and no longer sell less nutritious food and beverages for fundraisers. Food Service Director Penny Parham emphasized: *"[The key to success is] making sure that you put in place ways to earn fundraising revenue that is needed and not just taking away the opportunity without having something else there to replace it."*

"Now, we just figure out a different way to raise money--as opposed to utilizing food that is unhealthy. If anything [the impact has been that] it brought awareness. I don't know if I'd put a dollar value to it. I don't like to associate the awareness of eating healthy with 'oh did we lose money?'"

Caren Walker-Gregory, Headmaster,
Kennedy Academy, Boston Public Schools

In Bismarck, North Dakota, the parent teacher organization (PTO) at Century High School also voluntarily changed their practices to meet the new standards and reported no decreases in sales. In Bismarck, school bands, boosters, and athletic clubs all comply with the wellness policy and are selling fewer junk foods (and only after school). In New London, Connecticut, school stores have successfully transitioned to not selling junk food and schools have been successful with alternative fundraisers such as flower and teddy bear sales for Valentine's Day and a basketball tournament for a Red Cross fundraiser that has the added benefit of including physical activity. Several districts also recommended developing or using toolkits for teachers, PTAs, and clubs with ideas for nonfood fundraising.

Conclusion

The school districts in this study demonstrated many innovative strategies in implementing stronger nutrition standards. Their successes in fundraising, classroom celebrations, and through vending machines, as well as cafeteria options, demonstrate that with concerted effort by administrators, students, teachers, and families, revenues for districts can be maintained with the elimination of unhealthy foods and beverages.

For more ideas, please visit iphionline.org/center-for-policy-and-partnerships/controlling-junk-food-and-the-bottom-line for four more tip sheets.

Resources

USDA: United State Department of Agriculture

Smart Snacks in School Nutrition Standards <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Legislation/allfoods.htm>

HealthierUS Schools Challenge <http://www.fns.usda.gov/hussc/healthierus-school-challenge>

School Nutrition Environment and Wellness Resources <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/local-wellness-policy-resources/school-nutrition-environment-and-wellness-resources-0>

CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Competitive Foods Resource Center <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/standards.htm>

State Public Health Actions to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health

<http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/about/statepubhealthactions-prevCD.htm>

School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr6005.pdf>

School Health Index <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/SHI/>

Action for Healthy Kids

<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/>

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

Healthy Schools Builder <https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/>

Swap Your Snack https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take_action/schools/swap_your_snack/

Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs, Cornell University

Smarter Lunchrooms Movement <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/>

IOM: Institute of Medicine

Stallings, V. A., & Yaktine, A. L., eds. (2007). *Nutrition standards for foods in schools: Leading the way toward healthier youth*. National Academies Press. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2007/Nutrition-Standards-for-Foods-in-Schools-Leading-the-Way-toward-Healthier-Youth.aspx>

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