

Back to School Talking Points

As kids go back to school this year, schools will be an even healthier place for our nation's children.

This year, schools are adopting nutrition standards that ensure that all foods and beverages sold in schools, including through vending machines, school stores, a la carte lines and fundraisers, are healthy.

- The snack food and beverage guidelines help reinforce healthy habits that parents teach at home.
- Parents support healthier school foods – voters favor national standards for calories, fat, and sodium in snack and a la carte foods sold in U.S. schools and encourage the consumption of fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy items.
<http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/about/news-room/press-releases/2012/04/19/voters-want-healthy-snacks-in-schools>
- The updated standards for snacks and beverages are long overdue and ensure that all foods in schools align with the latest nutrition science. These rules were last updated in 1979 when fewer than 1 in 10 children were overweight or obese and vending machines in schools were less prevalent.

Schools have made tremendous progress toward providing students with healthier learning environments.

- Many schools have been working to make meals healthier and over 90 percent now report meeting the recently updated healthier school lunch standards.
<http://www.pinterest.com/pin/237635317812234974/>
- Thousands of schools have already made changes through state or local policies or were ahead of the game by participating in certification programs through USDA or the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. These trailblazers demonstrate that it's possible to serve healthy foods that kids will eat without negatively affecting schools' financial bottom line.
- Many states are already on track to meeting these standards and have laws in place improving school snacks and beverages.ⁱ
 - The updated USDA standards ensure that all students – no matter where they live – will have access to healthy school meals and snacks.

It's important that schools continue moving forward with healthy improvements because...

- Many children spend more time in school than any other place besides home.
- Many kids consume up to half of their daily calories in school.ⁱⁱ
- Over 90% of high school students and 80% of middle school students can buy food or drinks from a la carte in school cafeterias.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Although healthy foods and beverages are increasingly available, candy, sugary drinks, chips, cookies, and snack cakes are still sold in many schools.^{iv}

- The average child who buys snacks at school eats nearly 300 calories per day from those foods – a significant amount considering that as little as 165 additional calories per day may be responsible for the rise in childhood obesity.^v
- School food policies limiting access to high-fat, high-sugar foods are associated with fewer purchases of those items by students.^{vi}
- In states with strong snack food laws, children gained less weight over a 3-year period compared to states without strong laws.^{vii}
- Participation in school meals tends to increase when there is less access to unhealthy foods sold elsewhere in the school building.^{viii}
- Selling unhealthy foods in schools undermines nutrition education and sends children the message that good nutrition is unimportant. It also undermines parents' efforts to help their children eat healthfully.
- Parents shouldn't have to worry how their children will spend their lunch money -- or which line they get into in the cafeteria -- the lunch line or the a la carte line. All foods sold in schools should be healthful.

Smart Snack Talking Points

Improving school meals is critical but it's not the whole story.

Schools are beginning their third year of selling lunches that meet updated nutrition standards and are also improving their breakfasts. This year, schools also will improve the snacks and beverages they sell to ensure that they are as healthy as the meals.

- Some school districts have nutrition standards in place already, but many do not. This year, all schools across the country will switch to healthier snacks and beverages.
- A report by the Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project found that the majority of our nation's middle and high school students used to live in states where there was access to unhealthy snacks and beverages in schools. That's about to change.
- The USDA's Smart Snack standards will help ensure that snacks and beverages sold in schools meet basic healthy standards, while still giving schools flexibility to choose from a wide variety of snacks and beverages that meet standards.

Many school districts have already started making healthier options available, and they're succeeding. Students are eating and learning to enjoy more nutritious snacks and beverages.

- A study published in *Pediatrics* found that children and teens living in states with strong school snack laws gained less weight over a three-year period than those living in states without policies.^{ix}
- Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods' research found that school districts that have healthier snack food and beverage policies saw their total food service revenues either increase or remain steady after standards were put in place.^x

- Many school districts, including those in [Alabama](#), [Kentucky](#) and [Ohio](#), have come out ahead of USDA and have been [successful](#) in making the switch to healthier foods and drinks. Those places aren't seeing a decline in overall food service revenue; students are buying the healthier options.
- Many schools find they can raise money without selling unhealthy food and sugary beverages. There are many examples of practical and profitable healthy school fundraising approaches (see www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/Fundraising_Ideas_Fact_Sheet.pdf).

Schools and parents need to support one another in teaching kids healthy habits.

- Most parents want their kids to eat healthier and schools want kids to be at their best. Healthy school environments support those goals.
- Even the most attentive parents know they can't monitor their children's decisions in school. When parents send their kids to school with money for a meal or a snack, they want to know the options are nutritious, so that any choice kids make is a good one.
- A poll by the Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project shows that the majority of parents favor national nutrition standards for snacks and beverages sold in schools. *Let's give parents what they want.*
 - A Gallup poll found that two-thirds of Americans say that if given the opportunity, they would vote for a law that limits food sold in public schools to items that meet standards for high nutritional value.^{xi}

This is an urgent issue that affects all of us.

Over the last 30 years, our children's health is increasingly at risk.

- Less than 30 years ago, one in 10 U.S. children were overweight or obese. Today, it's nearly one in three kids.
- Children in the U.S. are increasingly diagnosed with diseases that used to only affect adults, like type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.
- A recent study demonstrates that type 2 diabetes rates have increased by 30 percent in teenagers over 10 years. This could have devastating effects on the health of our next generation and future health care costs.
- Healthier foods in schools can help minimize children's risks for these and other serious health problems as they get older.
- Reversing this trend won't be easy, but improving the nutrition of all food and beverages available in schools is a crucial part of the solution.

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- ⁱ www.rwjf.org/en/about-rwjf/newsroom/newsroom-content/2014/05/more-than-half-of-states-have-head-start-on-federal-smart-snack.html
- ⁱⁱ Gleason P, Sutor C. Food for Thought: Children's Diets in the 1990s. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 2001. Briefel RR, Wilson A, Gleason PM. "Consumption of low-nutrient, energy-dense foods and beverages at school, home, and other locations among school lunch participants and nonparticipants." *J Am Diet Assoc* 2009;109:Suppl-90.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Johnston LD, et al. "School policies and practices to improve health and prevent obesity: national secondary school survey results, 22 school years 2006–07 and 2007–08," Volume 1. Ann Arbor, MI: Bridging the Gap Program, Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, 2011. Larson N and Story M. "Are competitive foods sold at schools making our children fat?" *Health Affairs* 2010;29(3):430-435.
- ^{iv} www.pewtrusts.org/~media/Assets/2012/11/01/Pew_Out_of_Balance.pdf
- ^v Fox MK, Gordon A, Nogales R, and Wilson A. Availability and consumption of competitive foods in US public schools." *J Am Diet Assoc* 2009;109:S57-S66.
- ^{vi} Neumark-Sztainer D, French SA, Hannan PJ, Story M, and Fulkerson JA. "School lunch and snacking patterns among high school students: Associations with school food environment and policies." *IJBNPA* 2005;2:14-20.
- ^{vii} Taber DR, Chriqui JF, Perna FM, Powell LM, Chaloupka FJ. "Weight status among adolescents in states that govern competitive food nutrition content." *Pediatrics* 2012;130:437-444. ([summary](#) and [full report](#) available online)
- ^{viii} www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/0001/01/01/health-impact-assessment-national-nutrition-standards-for-snack-and-a-la-carte-foods-and-beverages-sold-in-schools
- ^{ix} Taber DR, Chriqui JF, Perna FM, Powell LM, Chaloupka FJ. "Weight status among adolescents in states that govern competitive food nutrition content." *Pediatrics* 2012;130:437-444.
- ^x www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/0001/01/01/health-impact-assessment-national-nutrition-standards-for-snack-and-a-la-carte-foods-and-beverages-sold-in-schools
- ^{xi} www.gallup.com/poll/161318/americans-favor-limiting-sale-unhealthy-food-schools.aspx