



# SMART SNACKS

## *Healthier School Snacks and Beverages*

### SCHOOL NUTRITION STANDARDS HAVE BEEN UPDATED

- The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 required the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to update the national nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold through vending machines, a la carte lines (foods sold individually in the cafeteria), school stores, fundraisers, and other foods sold to students outside the school meal programs during the school day.<sup>1</sup>
- Nutrition science has evolved since the USDA first implemented national school snack standards in the 1970s. The old standards were out of date from the standpoint of nutrition science, current dietary patterns, and public health concerns around child nutrition and obesity.
- Smart Snacks provide a baseline national standard. States and localities may go further than the national standard.

### **Nutritionally Poor Foods Have Been Widely Available through Vending Machines, Schools Stores, a La Carte, and Fundraisers**

- In 2012, over 80% of middle schools and 97% of high schools had vending machines.<sup>2</sup>
- Over 80% of middle and high school students could buy food or drinks a la carte in school cafeterias in 2012.<sup>3</sup>
- About half of elementary school students could buy food or drinks outside of school meals, through a la carte, vending machines, or school stores in 2012.<sup>4</sup>
- Although healthy foods and beverages are increasingly available, candy, sugary drinks, chips, cookies, and snack cakes were still sold in many schools before the USDA's Smart Snack Standards took effect.<sup>5</sup>

### **Nutritionally Poor Foods Undermine Children's Health**

- Over the last three decades, obesity rates have tripled in children and adolescents.<sup>6</sup>
- Unhealthy foods and beverages sold through vending machines, a la carte lines, and other venues outside school meals have a negative effect on students' diets and weight.<sup>7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15</sup> For example, secondary school students who consume sugar-sweetened beverages at school consume 230 calories more on average over the course of a day than students who do not drink sugary beverages at school.<sup>16</sup>

# NATIONAL SCHOOL NUTRITION STANDARDS HAVE BEEN UPDATED TO:

## LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

- Starting July 1, 2014, all schools that participate in the national school meal programs must implement Smart Snacks standards. Smart Snacks will ensure that all children in all states and districts have access to healthy food during the school day.
- Many states have passed policies to set nutrition standards for foods sold outside the school meal programs, and thousands of schools have already made healthy changes. However the majority of students live in states that have weak or no school snack standards.<sup>17</sup>
- Schools have been working to improve the quality of school lunches and breakfasts. Now, all foods sold to students in schools will need to meet nutrition standards, not only for meals but also for snacks and beverages sold through vending, a la carte, school stores, and fundraisers.

## SUPPORT PARENTS AND NUTRITION EDUCATION

- The sale of unhealthy food in schools undermines parents' ability to help their children eat healthfully. Parents should not have to worry how their children will spend their lunch money.
- Selling unhealthy foods in schools undermines nutrition education and sends children the message that good nutrition is unimportant.
- Parents want improved school foods. One national study found that most parents think the nutritional health of students should be a school priority.<sup>18</sup> A 2012 poll commissioned by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that 80% of American voters believe that schools should be required to meet higher nutrition standards for all foods they serve or sell to students.<sup>19</sup>

## PROTECT TAXPAYER INVESTMENT IN SCHOOL MEALS

- Federal taxpayers invest \$15 billion a year in school lunches and breakfasts. Unhealthy food sold outside of school meals undermines that taxpayer investment.
- The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act helps ensure that kids have healthy choices throughout school campuses for the whole school day. Snacks and beverages for sale should complement, not compete with, or undermine, the excellent progress that schools are making with school meals.

## IMPROVE CHILDREN'S DIETS

- On school days, kids eat 35-50% of their calories at school.<sup>20</sup>
- School food policies limiting access to high-fat, high-sugar foods are associated with fewer purchases of those items by students.<sup>21</sup>
- Kids in states with strong competitive foods policies have lower levels of obesity.<sup>22</sup>
- Nationally, 94% of elementary schools, 96% of middle schools, and 73% of high schools have closed campuses, which means most students are unable to leave campus to purchase foods during the school day.<sup>23</sup>

# References

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- <sup>4</sup> Bridging the Gap. School Policies and Practices for Improving Children's Health: National Elementary School Survey Result: School Years 2006-07 through 2011-12. April 2013 <[www.bridgingthegapresearch.org](http://www.bridgingthegapresearch.org)>.
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