

Date: December 2007

## Competitive Foods in Schools

### The Background

- Most children attend school for 6 hours per day, 180 days per year.<sup>1</sup>
- Schools have become a venue for “competitive” food and beverage sales outside of the school meals program.
- These items are found in vending machines, a la carte lines, and school stores, and tend to be high in calories and low in nutrients.<sup>2</sup>
- Nationally, 43% of elementary schools, 74% of middle/junior high schools, and 98% of senior high schools in the U.S. have vending machines, school stores, or snack bars.<sup>3</sup>
- Unlike the school meals program, competitive foods and beverages are not required to meet nutrition standards.<sup>4</sup>
- The Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommends that federally reimbursable school breakfast and lunch programs are the primary source of foods and beverages offered at school and that competitive foods are consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.<sup>2</sup>
- The IOM also recommends limiting opportunities for students to access competitive foods in schools.<sup>2</sup>
- School lunches provide one-third of the RDA for calories and key nutrients to students, and school breakfasts provide one-fourth of the RDA. More than 50% of U.S. children obtain either breakfast or lunch from the school meal programs.<sup>5</sup> Students participating in these programs are already getting a significant proportion of their daily calorie needs. Purchasing additional snacks from other sources may lead to consumption of extra calories, which increases the risk of obesity.
- The federal government invests significant resources in the school meals programs. In FY 2004, \$9.4 billion was spent on school lunch and breakfast, including cash payments and commodities.<sup>6</sup> Selling competitive foods in schools competes with the school meals program.
- Selling low-nutrition foods in schools contradicts nutrition education and sends children the message that good nutrition is not important.<sup>7</sup>
- Currently, 19 states have policies in place regarding the sale of competitive foods in schools.<sup>8</sup>

## Healthier Options = Bigger Profits

- Many schools and school districts around the country have made efforts to improve their school nutrition environments. By making healthier items available in vending machines, school stores, and a la carte sales, as well as renegotiating vending contracts and utilizing competitive pricing, schools have experienced an increase in revenue from competitive food sales. Some examples:
  - Vista Unified School District in California generated \$200,000 more in sales than it had in the previous year by purchasing its own vending machines and replacing high-fat, high-sugar snacks with healthier options.<sup>9</sup>
  - Venice High School's school store in Los Angeles increased snack sales by over \$1000 per month when they began offering healthier selections. Within two years, snack sales per month had nearly doubled from \$6,100 in May 2002 to \$12,000 in May 2004.<sup>9</sup>
  - After renegotiating their vending contracts to offer a higher proportion of healthy selections, Fayette County Public Schools in Kentucky increased revenues by \$4,000 within the first quarter. compared to the previous year.<sup>9</sup>
  - The city of Philadelphia switched from whole to low-fat milk saved 1.6 cents per pint, or \$340,000. By adding 100% fruit juice and water to vending machines, beverage revenues increased by 18%.<sup>10</sup>
  - By closing the school store during lunch periods, the cafeteria sales in Shrewsbury School District in Massachusetts increased by \$400 per week.<sup>9</sup>

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