

**Soft Drink Ban on School Campuses**

Childhood obesity has reached alarming levels in the United States of America (Bingham, 2002, National School Boards Association, 2002). The human toll of the obesity epidemic is alarming. Between 280,000 and 325,000 people die each year from obesity (Commercial Alert, 2003). Children need to be protected as they are at risk of developing long-term health problems that include: Diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure, and certain cancers. Obese children are also affected by low self-esteem, discrimination and physiological stress (State of Washington 58<sup>th</sup> Legislature, 2003). The sale of soft drinks and candy is rife in schools, which does not help ameliorate the situation.

*Child Obesity in the United States*

Age Group	Percentages	Percentage increase 1974-2003
6-11	15.3%	382%
12-19	15.5%	258%

Source: Commercial Alert, 2003

The National School Boards Association (2002) noted that research suggest that an extra soft drink a day increases a child’s risk for obesity by 60 percent. School children are therefore to be protected. Contrary to that general feeling, a study by Colison (2002) in New York did not find any correlation between food availability and obesity. Perhaps this suggests that there are other factors associated with obesity in children. A sedentary lifestyle is perceived to be one of the reasons for obesity in children (Bingham, 2002)

According to Bill No. 19, Chapter 913 S 19, (2001), The State of California requires the school board of a school district to give diligent care to the health and physical development of pupils. Any items offered for sale should be selected from a prescribed list of foods. What is

in vogue is the drive to ban soft drinks in schools. Several school districts in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York and Maryland have spearheaded the ban of soft drinks on school campuses. However, there seems to be no policy in place in these school districts. A telephone survey to these school districts confirmed that there are only school board resolutions to that effect (see appendices of board resolutions from San Francisco Unified District, Los Angeles Unified District, Walla Walla Public Schools and New York). San Francisco Unified School District was the first district in California to pass the resolution.

San Francisco Unified School District actually attempts to provide a complete healthy school nutrition environment to their students. Not only does it ban carbonated drinks, but also promotes healthy eating habits through physical fitness and allowing only certain snacks in the vending machines. Based on the recommendations of the Student Nutrition/Physical Advisory Committee, the San Francisco Unified School District approved the following drinks: bottled water, 100% fruit juice, and milk which may include flavored milk, fat-free, 1%, rice milk, soy milk.

A similar resolution was adopted by the Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest school district in the nation, on July 14, 2003. The district banned the sale of soft drinks in all of its schools. The Unified Los Angeles Unified School District health plan seems to be more comprehensive than the San Francisco Unified School District because it is more exhaustive, specific and elaborate. The ban will be in effective on January 1, 2004. It bans the sale of soft drinks on school campuses and prohibits schools from entering into new or renewing contracts for the sale of any non-approved beverages. The approved beverages are to be sold in vending machines, cafeterias, and student stores.

### *Allowed Drinks*

- Fruit based drinks composed of no less than 50% fruit juices with any added sweeteners, artificial flavors or colors.
- Drinking water with no additives except those minerals normally added to tap water.
- Soy milk fortified with calcium and B12 levels; 15% to 60% of the RDA); vitamin A and D may be added; no more than 18 grams of added sweetener per 8 oz; no artificial sweetener.
- Milk and flavored milks which should contain vitamin A and D at levels specified by the food and drug Administration and consistent with state and local Standards for such milk.
- Rice milk fortified with calcium and B12 levels; 15% to 60% of the RDA); vitamin A and D may be added; no more than 18 grams of added sweetener per 8 oz; no artificial sweetener.

### *Other alternatives allowed*

- Electrolyte replacement drinks that do not contain more than 42 grams of added sweetener per 20 ounce serving; 20 ounce maximum volume.
- Caffeinated beverages containing naturally occurring caffeine in cocoa with less than 20 milligrams per 12 oz. serving; no artificial sweeteners, flavors or colors.
- Drinking water with no additives except those minerals normally added to tap water (carbon without phosphoric acid is allowed).
- Fruit based drinks composed of no less than 50% fruit juices with no added sweeteners, with a dilution factor of the juice at 5 to 1, no artificial sweeteners, flavoring or colors. Carbonation without phosphoric acid is allowed.

### *Drinks not allowed*

- Carbonated beverages except fruit juice and water.
- Caffeinated beverages containing more than 20 milligrams or caffeine

per 12 oz. serving including coffee, tea and chai.

- Beverages containing additives such as herbal and non-vitamin supplements, food colorings and flavors not proven safe by the scientific community.
- Beverages containing vitamin and or mineral supplements including but not limited to chromium, magnesium, niacin, pantothenic acid, B6, and iron.
- Carbonated Sports Drinks.
- Beverages in glass bottles.

The City of New York Junk Free and Soda Free Act states that the department of education shall ensure that no minimally nutritious foods and beverages are served in any public school schools during all hours that school are open. It's 17-906 compliance states that "any school that violates the policy shall be required to forfeit any income earned by such violation to the general fund of the City of New York"

### **Financial Impact of the ban**

The motion to ban is obviously going to create a big financial dent on soft drink companies and schools. Schools have received thousands of dollars from soft drink sales and from exclusive contracts soft drink companies make money from selling their products. The loss of revenue to schools was given as 14 % by the Unified Los Angeles School District. Larson (2002) believes that the more schools resort to private enterprise as a source of funding, the fewer obligations on the school board, state legislature and congress to allocate money to public education. The National Association Soft Drinks Association believes that they are being singled out for a very complex problem. They obviously are likely to fight the motion.

In conclusion, the rationale behind the ban on soft drink sales in schools is a sublime thing. However its effectiveness still remains to be seen as some schools have an open campus policy where students are permitted to leave school campuses to go and have lunch. Koteles (2003) also doubts the effectiveness of such a ban, as students will have the drinks packed in their lunches. Probably the solution for schools is

to sell health foods that students will buy.  
Otherwise schools are set to lose considerable  
income if the motion to sell soft drinks gets  
adopted nationally.

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Idaho State University  
College of Education  
Intermountain Center for Education Effectiveness  
Dr. E.E. "Gene" Davis  
Director

Charles R. Zimmerly, MPA, Ed.D.  
Coordinator for the Center for Policy Studies,  
Education Research and Community Development  
College of Education, Idaho State University

Precious Mudiwa  
Graduate Assistant  
Center for Policy Studies, Education Research and  
Community Development  
College of Education, Idaho State University



