



National School Nutrition Standards

National School Nutrition Standards Are Required by Law

- The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 requires the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to update national nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold through vending machines, a la carte lines (foods sold individually in the cafeteria), school stores, and other foods sold outside the school meal programs during the school day.¹

Current USDA Nutrition Standards for Foods Sold Outside of Meals Are Outdated

- Nutrition science has evolved since the USDA implemented its nutrition standards in the 1970s. The current standards no longer make sense from the standpoint of nutrition science, current dietary patterns, and public health concerns around child nutrition and obesity.
- Current nutrition criteria for foods sold outside of meals only apply to “foods of minimal nutritional value,” such as seltzer water, hard candy, and popsicles, and do not address calories, saturated fat, trans fat, sodium, or other key nutrition concerns.²

Nutritionally Poor Foods Are Widely Available in Schools

- Between 1991 and 2008, the percentage of middle schools with vending machines increased from 42% to 77% and the percentage of high schools from 76% to 96%.^{3,4}
- In 2008, 92% of high school students and 81% of middle school students could buy food or drinks from a la carte in school cafeterias.⁴
- In 2010, 65% of elementary school students could buy food or drinks outside of school meals, through a la carte lines, vending machines, or school stores.⁵
- Although healthy foods and beverages are increasingly available, candy, sugary drinks, chips, cookies, and snack cakes are still sold in many schools.^{3,4,5,6,7}



Nutritionally Poor Foods Undermine Children’s Health

- Over the last two decades, obesity rates have tripled in children and adolescents.⁸
- 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.^{9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17} 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.¹⁸

Current Practices Are Costly to Federal Taxpayers

- By developing a pattern for eating low-nutrition foods, children increase their risk of developing diet-related diseases, such as obesity, heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. U.S. health-care costs due to obesity are \$147 billion a year, half of which are paid for by federal taxpayers through Medicare and Medicaid.¹⁹

National School Nutrition Standards Should be Updated to:

Protect Taxpayer Investment in School Meals

- Minimum national nutrition standards for food sold outside of school meals are needed to protect the integrity of the school lunch program and the health of all children in all states.
- The federal government invested \$13.7 billion in FY 2010 in school lunches and breakfasts.²⁰ Unhealthy food sold outside of school meals undermines that taxpayer investment.
- Two-thirds of states have weak or no nutrition standards for foods sold outside of meals.²¹
- Many school districts do not have the staff or expertise to develop science-based nutrition standards for school foods. Only about half of elementary, middle, and high school students are in a school with nutrition guidelines for foods and drinks sold outside of school meals.^{4,5}



Improve Children's Diets

- On school days, an estimated 35-50% of children's total calories are consumed at school.²²
- School food policies limiting access to high-fat, high-sugar foods are associated with fewer purchases of those items by students.^{22,23,24,25}
- 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.⁶

Support Parents and Nutrition Education

- Selling unhealthy foods in schools undermines nutrition education and sends children the message that good nutrition is unimportant.
- 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.
- Parents want improved school foods. One national study found that most parents felt the nutritional health of students should be a school priority.²⁶ In addition, a 2011 poll commissioned by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that 78% of American voters believe that schools should be required to meet higher nutrition standards for all foods they serve or sell to students.²⁷

For more information, contact the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity at nana@cspinet.org or 202.777.8387 or visit www.nanacoalition.org.

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