

Issue Brief

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Food Marketing Within the School

Background

Children's eating patterns are strongly influenced by many factors including their physical and social environments.¹ Among the numerous environmental influences on youth, none has more rapidly assumed a central socializing role than the media and marketing messages.² Food marketing messages and advertising have begun to permeate the school environment. Advertising and marketing messages reach youth during the school day through a wide variety of channels including broadcast and cable television, radio, magazines, internet, music and most recently, cellular phones. Unfortunately, the majority of companies who advertise in schools are vendors of unhealthful food and sugar-sweetened beverage products. Following a review of the scientific evidence on the influence of marketing on food choices and diet-related health of children and youth, researchers concluded that the current marketing practices put children's long-term health at risk.²

Best Practice

Schools can play a key role in achieving and sustaining healthful eating practices and stabilizing or reversing the overweight trends in youth by:

- Coordinating consistent messages that encourage and reinforce healthy food and beverage choices throughout the school environment
- Developing and supporting school policies (local wellness policy) and nutrition education programs that provide consistent healthy messages in a comprehensive and sequential manner
- Making available and marketing nutritious products and behaviors that model healthy eating practices within the school environment³
- Collaborating on efforts to improve the school environment, including all stakeholders such as students, faculty, school administration, foodservice staff, parents and vendors
- Forming school-corporate partnerships with clearly defined educational goals, specific measures and agreed-upon outcomes that have a positive impact on youth
- Creation of review committees at the local level, that include broad representation of stakeholders to evaluate all existing and future food and beverage contracts and practices

Additional information is available in the report

Shaping Youth Behavior: Impact of School Environments on Physical Activity and Food Choices at:

www.maine-nutrition.org

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Action Steps

- Conduct an assessment of the school food environment to ascertain whether consistent messages are being provided to students that promote healthy eating practices including the classroom, the lunch room, competitive food sales, school sponsored events, school recreation areas and teacher lounges
- Involve students and key stakeholders in nutrition interventions to create a school environment that supports healthy eating practices and lifestyle patterns
- At least annually, review and revise school local wellness policies that provide specific nutrition guidelines for all foods sold in the school environment
- Provide teacher trainings that enable faculty to successfully incorporate nutrition education into classroom curriculum in a comprehensive, sequential manner

Resources

- Alliance for a Healthier Generation – a partnership between the American Heart Association and the William Clinton Foundation to reduce childhood obesity. Web site provides recommendations for healthier schools and school beverage guidelines. <http://www.healthiergeneration.org>
- American Dietetic Association – offers credible nutrition information, resources and access to Registered Dietitians nationwide. <http://www.eatright.org>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – offers the latest evidence-based research on a variety of health topics and recommendations for healthy living. <http://www.cdc.gov>
- Center for Science in the Public Interest – a nonprofit that promotes education and advocacy to improve nutrition. Web site offers nutrition action health letter and the latest information on nutrition policies and legislation. <http://www.cspinet.org>
- Food and Nutrition Information Center – offers nutrition information, resources and brochures on the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans and Food Guide Pyramid. <http://fnic.nal.usda.gov>
- National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine – provides a wealth of information and latest recommendations on child health, food and nutrition, public health & prevention. <http://www.iom.edu>
- USDA Team Nutrition Program – offers nutrition information, nutrition guidelines and sample policies to support Child Nutrition Programs in schools. <http://www.fns.usda.gov>
- Action Packet: Create Environments that Increase Vegetable and Fruit Consumption. Offers a step by step process for increasing access and availability of fruits and vegetables in your community. <http://www.maine-nutrition.org/StateLocal/ActionPackets.htm>
- Action Packet: Develop Policies that Support Healthy Options in Vending Machines. Offers a step by step process for bringing about healthier changes in vending machines. <http://www.maine-nutrition.org/StateLocal/ActionPackets.htm>

References

1. Patrick, H, Nicklas, TA, “A review of family and social determinants of children’s eating patterns and diet quality”, J Am Coll Nutr, 2005 Apr; 24 (2): 83-92).
2. National Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Medicine, “Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?” Accessed at www.nap.edu/books on 4/28/07.
3. Wiecha, JL et al, “When children eat what they watch: impact of television viewing on dietary intake in youth”, Arch Pediatric Adolescent Medicine, 2006, April 160 (4): 436-42.