

Food marketing in schools

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Food and beverage companies frequently target children with marketing inside their schools, where they are a captive audience. This marketing shapes children's preferences for foods and beverages that put their health at risk.



Credit: Stacey Tucker

Food marketing to children works²

Children prefer advertised foods, influence their parents' purchases, and they consume more advertised products, including fast food and sugary drinks.

All children deserve to be healthy

- American children get almost half of their calories from nutritionally poor foods, like desserts, pizza, sweet and sugary snacks, fruit drinks and sugary soda¹.
- The food and beverage industry spends **\$1.8 billion dollars** each year targeting children and teens with marketing for almost exclusively unhealthy foods².
- This may be the first generation of children to live shorter lives than their parents due to diet-related diseases such as heart disease, Type II diabetes and obesity³.

Food marketing in schools is big business⁴

- Children spend 8 hours a day, almost 200 days per year in school, where they are a captive audience for food marketing – marketing primarily for sugary drinks, fast food and candy.
- These messages are designed to build brand loyalty and encourage children to become lifelong customers.
- Marketing in schools endorses unhealthy products through association with trusted teachers and schools.
- Food marketing is often disguised as charity in the form of scholarships, sponsorships and donated school equipment, such as scoreboards.

Schools should be places of learning, not food marketing

- Unhealthy food marketing is directly at odds with school health and nutrition curriculum.
 - It sends misleading and confusing messages to students and parents; and
 - Undermines parental authority, making it more difficult for parents to say "no" when they don't want to purchase products marketed through schools.
- Unhealthy food marketing is more prevalent in schools in neighborhoods with limited access to healthy foods and beverages.

How EXACTLY is food marketed in schools?

- Food coupons for student incentives (Pizza Hut Book-It, Sonic Limeades for Learning).
- In-school promotions and fundraisers (Hershey's sales, McDonald's McTeacher Nights).
- Curricular materials (Gatorade book covers, M&M's counting books).
- Reward programs for purchases (General Mill's Box Tops for Education).
- Brand logos on vending machines, scoreboards and coolers.
- Banner ads on educational websites aimed at teachers, such as coolmath-games.com.



Food marketing in schools is pervasive⁵



- In 2 out of 3 elementary schools, food companies offer coupons to children as rewards.
- 3 in 10 high schools serve branded fast food **every week**; 2 in 10 serve it **every day**.
- 7 out of 10 elementary and middle school students see food marketing in their school hallways, cafeterias, and on vending machines **every day**.

But don't schools need the money?⁶

- 2 out of 3 branded fundraisers raise **no money at all** for schools.
- Vending machines provide schools with **just \$2 to \$4 per student** per year.
- At McTeacher's Nights, schools get as little as **\$1 per student**.

What do parents think?

- **2 out of 3 parents** support limits on marketing in schools⁶.
- **Most school officials** also support limits⁷.
- **Over 7 out of 10 parents** support setting nutrition standards for foods sold for fundraising.

Change is happening

- In July 2016, [USDA released the final rule](#) for local school wellness policies. The rule required districts participating in the federal school meals programs to update their school wellness policies to address unhealthy food marketing to students in schools by June 30, 2017. At a minimum, districts must prohibit marketing of food and drinks that do not meet Smart Snacks in School nutritional standards on school property during the school day.
- State laws in **Maine, Nevada, California, and Rhode Island** limit the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages in public schools.
- Local school districts, like **San Francisco**, are setting policies to get rid of food marketing.



¹Reedy J, Krebs-Smith SM. Dietary sources of energy, solid fats, and added sugars among children and adolescents in the United States. *Journal of the American Dietetics Association*. 2010; 110:1477-1484. ²Federal Trade Commission. A review of food marketing to children and adolescents – follow-up report. Federal Trade Commission website. <http://www.ftc.gov/reports/review-food-marketing-children-adolescent-follow-report>. Published December 2012. ³Olshansky SJ, Passaro DJ, Hershow RC, et al. A Potential Decline in Life Expectancy in the United States in the 21st Century. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2005; 352:1138-1145. ⁴Harris JL, Fox T. Food and beverage marketing in schools: Putting student health at the head of the class. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2014;168:206-208. ⁵Terry-McElrath YM, Turner L, Sandoval A., Johnston LD, Chaloupka FJ. Commercialism in US elementary and secondary school nutrition environments: trends from 2007 to 2012 [published online January 13, 2014]. *JAMA Pediatrics*. Doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2013.4521. ⁶Harris JL, Fleming Milici F, Sarda V, Schwartz MB. Rudd report: Parents' attitudes about food marketing to children: 2012 to 2015 <http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/Rudd%20Center%20Parent%20Attitudes%20Report%202017.pdf>.

⁷Molnar A, Garcia DR, Boninger F, Merill B. Marketing of foods of minimal nutritional value to children in schools. *Prev Med*. 2008;47(5):504-507.