

Improving Competitive Foods

For many students, school mealtime rarely consists of a nutritionally balanced meal. For these students, lunch and sometimes breakfast at school consists of individual items selected from a la carte food lines, vending machines, and the school store. Items available at these locations are typically high in fat, sugar, sodium, and calories, and low in essential nutrients.

While the federal government has established nutrition standards for school meals under the NSLP and SBP, there are no reasonable standards for Competitive Foods. More and more states are setting such standards.

Because nutritionally inadequate foods are now so widely available to children at school every day, it has become difficult for children to "balance out" their excesses, thereby making all-meal nutrition guidelines ineffective. It is therefore essential that nutrition standards be developed for CF's.

Suggested Guidelines For CF's

At each elementary school, the only food that may be sold to a pupil during breakfast and lunch periods is food that is sold as a full meal, unless the food is a fruit, non-fried vegetable, legume, dairy product, or whole grain product.

An individual food item sold to a pupil during breakfast or lunch at (ideally) any school K-12 shall have not more than 35% of its total calories from fat, not more than 10% of its total calories from saturated fat, not more than 35% of its total weight composed of sugar (except in the case of fresh fruits or vegetables)

Portion sizes should be no larger than portion served as part of the school lunch

Other Good Guidelines:

A school may permit the sale of food items that do not comply with the nutritional guidelines for CF's as part of a school fundraising event if the items are sold by pupils of the school, and the sale of those items takes place at least one-half hour before the beginning and after the end of the school day

Schools should set policies that discourage or prohibit sugar-laden treats and drinks at classroom parties

Schools should set policies that discourage or prohibit teachers from using candy, food, or fast-food certificates as student rewards.

Schools should provide, at no charge, safe drinking water and cups during school mealtimes.

Schools should allow for mealtimes of sufficient length to allow the enjoyment and completion of healthy meals

Schools should work with local suppliers to provide fresh fruits and vegetables at low-cost

Ideas for vended foods & beverages: fresh fruits & vegetables, canned fruits in light syrup, dried fruits, trail mixes (containing dried fruits, unsalted nuts & sunflower seeds), frozen 100% fruit bars, ginger snaps, whole wheat fig bars, animal crackers, granola bars (made with unsaturated fats), pretzels, whole wheat crackers, baked potato chips, unbuttered popcorn, ready-to-eat low-sugar cereals, whole wheat bagels or pita bread with hummus or light cream cheese, bottled water, low-fat milk, 100% fruit or vegetable juices

Did You Know?

Healthy students make better learners. Besides helping to address the epidemic of obesity, schools have an additional incentive to promote healthy food consumption: healthy eating plays a very important role in learning and cognitive development. Poor diet has been found to adversely influence the ability to learn and to decrease motivation and attentiveness. Young people are not ready to learn and achieve their full potential unless they are healthy and well-nourished. Schools that have gotten junk foods off campus are reporting fewer suspensions and decreased disciplinary problems, as well!