

Oregon Nutrition Policy Alliance

Healthy Foods for Healthy Students HB 2650

Support statewide school nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold outside the federal school meals program

We are facing a public health crisis of overweight and obese children. Overweight children are more likely to suffer from diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, heart disease, and cancer. Schools should model and teach healthy habits to children. Let's make the healthy food and beverage choice the easy choice for all of Oregon's students.

Questions and Answers about Oregon's School Nutrition Bill

Why does Oregon need a law about school foods and beverages?

Many schools in Oregon still sell unhealthy foods and beverages out of vending machines, school stores and a-la-carte in the cafeteria. Common items sold include soda, imitation fruit drinks, chips, cookies and snack cakes. Selling junk foods and beverages undermines parents' ability to help their children eat healthfully and sends children the message that good nutrition is not important. The school environment should reinforce classroom nutrition education by modeling and supporting healthy behaviors.

Isn't the real problem the lack of exercise kids get today?

Lack of exercise is only part of the equation:



Calories in = calories out for maintaining weight.

The childhood obesity epidemic is being caused by both increased food consumption and a reduction in physical activity. We need to improve eating habits AND increase physical activity.

What will this bill do?

This bill will establish nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold outside of the federal meals program in schools. The nutrition standards address calories, portion size and the amount of fat and sugar allowed in foods and beverages.

How did you decide on these particular standards?

It is nearly impossible to come up with the perfect, most scientifically defensible nutrition standards. In order to be implemented in schools, it is important that the standards be clear and understandable. Since other states have already implemented these nutrition guidelines, it will be easier for Oregon to do the same.

What will it mean for my child at school?

The nutrition standards in this bill will ensure that the food and beverages sold to your child at school will be healthy and thus reinforce the nutrition messages taught in the classroom.

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Won't this mean that my child no longer will have a choice of food and beverages at her/his school?

There will always be choices. Nutrition standards will ensure that your child can make a healthful choice at school.

What about birthday parties and other celebrations?

The bill sets standards for foods and beverages SOLD in schools. Schools may set guidelines for foods and beverages at parties and other celebrations. Kids can still bring foods and beverages from home.

Isn't there a federal bill dealing with school foods?

Yes, the Harkin Bill is addressing this issue. If Congress passes meaningful nutrition standards, then we would not need this legislation in Oregon. However, it is important for Oregon to take care of our students. We can't wait for the Feds!

Weren't schools required to create Wellness Policies to address this issue?

The Federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 required that all school districts with federally-funded meal programs develop and implement wellness policies that address nutrition and physical activity. This was a step in the right direction, but did not get the job done. Less than 20% of the wellness policies in Oregon's school districts mentioned specific nutrition guidelines for snacks. Schools vary widely in how well their policies address the required issues. At this point, there is no way to really know how schools are changing their environments. For these reasons, we must enact statewide school nutrition standards as a bare minimum.

Who supports statewide nutrition standards for food and beverages sold outside the federal schools meals program?

This bill is supported by a broad coalition of doctors, dentists, nurses, registered dietitians, parents, educators, and public health professionals.

What about the voluntary guidelines that the beverage and snack industries agreed to?

There are voluntary agreements between the beverage industry, food manufacturers, and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation (a collaboration between the Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association). The beverage industry agreement encourages schools to work with their vendors to eliminate regular soda and some other sugary drinks in schools, basically starting in 2009. The snack food agreement encourages schools to work with their vendors to eliminate foods that do not meet specified nutrition criteria. Since these agreements are voluntary, there is no way to guarantee that they will be followed. The standards in our bill are very similar to these voluntary guidelines, however, a law will make them mandatory.

Why is diet soda allowed?

The agreement with the beverage industry allows diet soda to be sold in high schools. Many of us in Oregon don't think that is a good idea. But, politically, there is an advantage to aligning our beverage standards with those in the voluntary agreement.

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Why is 12oz of juice allowed in high school instead of 8oz?

High school kids generally require more calories than elementary schools, so a larger size drink is appropriate.

Why not just eliminate juice?

We're just not there yet! Our society is not ready to eliminate juices from the school environment. It's true, many juices have little to recommend them nutritionally, but kids enjoy them, many parents support having juice, and the portion sizes in the proposed standards would be considerably smaller than what is offered currently.

Why is chocolate milk allowed?

The majority of chocolate milk in schools is made with nonfat milk and chocolate flavoring, which adds a small amount of sugar to the milk (about 12 grams, or 3 teaspoons of sugar). In the scheme of things, this is not a lot of sugar. Other nutrients in milk outweigh this small amount of sugar.

Why is caffeine allowed?

There is no evidence to support kids drinking caffeinated beverages in school. However, caffeine consumption is not directly related to the development of obesity, which is our main concern.

Will these nutrition standards be easy for schools to implement?

Since a number of states have already passed school nutrition bills, the market is driving the development of new products and packaging which will facilitate implementation of the new standards. Industry is responding to our demand for healthier foods in the schools, making it easier for individual school districts in Oregon to comply with the new standards for foods and beverages sold outside the federal school meals program.

Will these new standards have any effect on school budgets?

There may be an initial drop in revenue; however, school districts across the country have made similar changes to offer healthier foods and beverages and are now making more money. A federal study shows that students will buy and consume healthful foods and beverages – and schools can still make money by selling smaller portion sizes. (*Making It Happen*) Bottom line, schools should not be making a profit at the expense of our children's health.

Didn't Portland Public School do a lot of good work improving the nutrition of school foods and beverages WITHOUT a law?

Yes, the Portland Public Schools banished junk food and stopped selling a la carte entrees. Vending machines in Portland Public Schools have dropped soda in favor of water, milk and juice, and have replaced sugary and fried snack foods with healthier alternatives. Some school districts in Oregon are trying to do the same, but there is no consistency or oversight. All kids deserve the same high standards – not just the kids in Portland - and a law is the only way to set statewide nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold outside the federal school meals program.

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Why should we bother to set nutrition standards for school foods and beverages in high schools?

Some Oregon high schools have “open campuses” that allow students to leave campus during the lunch period and purchase food off-campus. However, even for high school students, it is important to have consistent messages about nutrition on campus. The school environment should reinforce classroom nutrition education by modeling and supporting healthy behaviors.