

# Healthy Concessions & Competitive Foods:

## Vending Machines, A La Carte & School Stores



Concessions sold at school events, vending machines, a la carte lines (foods sold individually in the cafeteria), and school stores provide an opportunity for schools to send consistent, positive health messages by offering nutritious choices that comply with the updated United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) standards required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

### How Can Advocates Support Healthier Concessions and Competitive Foods?

- Review your school or district wellness policy to see if it addresses competitive foods. If not, see if the policy has other language or guidelines that support your cause.
- A la carte lines are usually operated by nutrition services. Concessions, vending machines and school stores may be run by the school, nutrition services, PTO/PTA, booster clubs, a sports program or another group. Find out which group is in charge at your school.
- Approach the group in a friendly and professional manner. Explain that you are trying to create a healthier school food environment and that you'd like to discuss the possibility of offering healthier choices. Use your district wellness policy as a platform if possible.
- Although vending machines are usually in schools for a contracted amount of time, it may be possible to talk to the vending company about trading unhealthy options for more nutritious ones until a new contract can be written.
- Consider restricting the hours that school stores and vending machines are open and available. Many schools do not allow access during breakfast and lunch hours; some block access during the entire school day.
- Look into healthy vending machines and research healthy options for concessions, a la carte lines and school stores. An online search will bring up a variety of options. Use criteria from the HealthierUS School Challenge as a guide (information follows).
- Price healthy items cheaper than less healthy options. Two studies have found that lowering the price of fruits, vegetables and low-fat snacks resulted in a significant increase in the sales of these foods without a decrease in total revenue.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Talk with local public health experts about grants or other ways to fund healthy changes to your school's concessions, vending machines, school stores and all competitive foods.
- Convince school and community members that the changes are win-win: concessions and competitive foods will continue to make money, and students will be consuming healthier food and drink options.

#### What are competitive foods?

Sold in schools outside of meal programs, "competitive foods" compete for student dollars with nutritionally regulated breakfast and lunch programs. Foods and beverages sold through vending machines, a la carte lines, school stores and some fundraisers are considered competitive foods. Concessions sold at sporting events and other school activities may fall into the fundraising category.

**Myth:** Schools will lose revenue if they switch to selling healthier food.

**Reality:** Schools across the country are switching to healthier foods and are not losing revenue. In fact, many schools end up making *more* money, as increased sales of school meals make up for losses from a la carte and vending sales.<sup>3</sup>



# Competitive Foods

## Standards for Competitive Foods

The HealthierUS School Challenge is a voluntary certification initiative established in 2004 by the USDA to recognize schools that have created healthier school environments through the promotion of nutrition and physical activity. The program includes specific criteria for competitive foods that can be used as a guide for efforts to create a healthier school food culture. To view the criteria, visit [http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/2012criteria\\_chart.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/2012criteria_chart.html) . To view the competitive foods calculator, visit <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/HUSSC/calculator.html> .

Healthy Options		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Bottled water</li> <li>■ Low fat/fat-free milk</li> <li>■ 100% fruit juice</li> <li>■ Unsweetened iced tea</li> <li>■ Coconut water</li> <li>■ Fresh fruit</li> <li>■ Single-serve fruit bowls</li> <li>■ Freeze-dried fruit</li> <li>■ Squeezable fruit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Low fat string cheese</li> <li>■ Low fat/fat-free yogurt</li> <li>■ Dried fruit, 100% fruit leather</li> <li>■ Applesauce (no sugar added)</li> <li>■ Whole grain crackers*</li> <li>■ Granola bars*</li> <li>■ Natural snack bars*</li> <li>■ Popcorn*</li> <li>■ Baked chips</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Nuts</li> <li>■ Trail mix</li> <li>■ Fresh veggies with dip</li> <li>■ Frozen 100% fruit bars</li> <li>■ Non-food items, such as school supplies and merchandise that features the school logo</li> </ul> <p><i>*low fat/low sodium/low sugar</i></p>



## Additional Resources

Learn more about working with nutrition services to implement healthy changes to cafeteria offerings:  
[www.ActionforHealthyKids.org/ParentToolkit-SchoolMeals](http://www.ActionforHealthyKids.org/ParentToolkit-SchoolMeals)

Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/Healthyyouth/nutrition/standards.htm> and  
[http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/pdf/financial\\_implications.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/pdf/financial_implications.pdf)

“Dispelling School Food Funding Myths” - National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity:  
<http://www.ActionforHealthyKids.org/DispellingFoodFundingMyths-NANA>

**Action for Healthy Kids®** partners with teachers, students, parents, school wellness experts and more to fight childhood obesity, undernourishment and physical inactivity by helping schools become healthier places so kids can live healthier lives. Our programs, tools and resources make it possible for everyone to play their part in ending the nation’s childhood obesity epidemic.

[www.ActionforHealthyKids.org](http://www.ActionforHealthyKids.org)

The websites listed in this document are provided as a service only to identify potentially useful ideas and resources for creating healthier school cultures. Action for Healthy Kids is not responsible for maintaining these external websites, nor does the listing of these sites constitute or imply endorsement of their content.

<sup>1</sup> French S.A., Story M., Jeffrey R.W., Snyder P., Eisenberg M., Sidebottom A., Murray D. Pricing strategy to promote fruit and vegetable purchase in high school cafeterias. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 1997, vol. 97, pp. 1008-1010.

<sup>2</sup> French S.A., Jeffrey R.W., Story M., Breitlow K.K., Baxter J.S., Hannan P. et al. Pricing and promotion effects on low-fat vending snack purchases: the CHIPS Study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 2001, vol. 91, pp. 112-117.

<sup>3</sup> “Dispelling School Food Funding Myths.” National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity.

