

## Smart Snacks Q&A

### **Are there any national standards already in place regulating such snacks and beverages?**

There have been national standards for some snacks and beverages in schools for over 30 years, but they are out of date and do not reflect current knowledge in nutrition. It's important that they are updated, because healthier food in schools means healthier kids. Healthier kids are better students and better equipped to learn. In the longer-term, ensuring that all food and beverages available in schools are nutritious can reduce children's risk for obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and high blood pressure.

### **But snack foods and beverages are just one component of a child's daily intake. How can we be sure that providing healthier options at school will make a difference?**

Many children get as many as half of their daily calories while at school, so what they eat and drink while there plays a major role in contributing to their overall health and well-being. Every day, four in 10 kids purchase a food or beverage at school that is not part of the school meal programs—from the cafeteria a la carte line, a vending machine, or the school store. With those items playing such a major role in the daily diets of our children, we need to ensure they are healthy and nutritious.

### **Will schools lose money by implementing these new standards?**

With nearly one in three U.S. children overweight or obese and associated health care costs rising rapidly, we can't afford not to implement healthy nutrition standards for all foods sold in schools. Many school districts across the country have already started making changes to offer healthier fare, and it is working. It may take students a little while to adjust, but experience shows that they will eat healthier snacks. The implementation of school nutrition standards will, in many cases, increase school revenue over the longer term because more students will likely purchase school meals, which are financially more beneficial to schools and more balanced for kids.

### **Local schools and parents should decide what their kids can buy at school, not the federal government.**

School nutrition standards have long been set at the national level, dating back to the 1940s. Decisions about what foods are served in schools are made on the local level, including what's on the menu, what recipes are used, how often specific foods are served and how food is presented. Schools will have the same freedom to choose snacks that meet the basic national nutrition standards.

Most parents want their kids to eat healthfully, but even the most attentive parents can't monitor what their kids eat and drink at school. When parents send their kids to school with lunch money, they want to know that the options will be nutritious—whether it is lunch or a snack. Also, kids bring lessons learned at school home to their families. If we reach kids in schools, they can, in turn, teach their parents about safe and healthy eating habits too.

**How can you ensure kids will eat healthier items? Isn't it better for them to eat something—anything—than to throw healthier foods and beverages in the trash?**

Experience shows that kids will eat healthier options. Although these standards are new from a national perspective, they aren't new for everyone. The food industry has come up with products that meet the new standards and they have been well received. In fact, sales of healthier snacks are outpacing traditional snack foods by 4 to 1 and contribute to increased sales growth and profits for food companies. Many schools across the country have already started making changes like these, and they work. It may take a little time, but kids can learn to eat and enjoy healthier options.

Many schools that have successfully implemented school nutrition standards have found that by surveying kids, conducting taste tests and offering samples, kids eat and enjoy healthier options. Common-sense guidelines that make sure students are served healthy snacks rather than empty calories give parents the peace of mind that their schools are reinforcing the good messages they are trying to provide at home.

**Won't kids just bring junk food from home?**

Parents and schools should be partners in instilling healthier eating habits in children—one cannot succeed without the other. We have a responsibility to make sure that school food is nutritious and to teach kids how to make healthy choices. Many children consume up to half of their daily calories at school, and at least 40% of children are getting some of those calories from snacks and beverages purchased separately from the school lunch program or a meal brought from home. That's why it is so important that all the foods sold in schools meet nutrition standards.

**Kids across the country—particularly athletes—are already complaining that new lunch guidelines don't allow them to get enough food to make it through the day. If we take away their ability to buy snacks, won't we be making a bad situation even worse?**

Before the new lunch guidelines, high schools were offering an average of 857 calories to students at lunch. The new school lunch limit of 850 calories per meal means most high school students are getting the same amount of calories at lunch as before the new standards went into place—they're just getting them from healthier food.

Students will still be able to buy snacks, but those snacks will be healthier. Highly active students, such as athletes, may need more calories and other nutrients to get through both school and after school athletic events. This is another reason why it's important to make sure that the snacks schools are selling are nutritious and will help students perform well in school and in after-school activities. Schools also can participate in the USDA afterschool snack or supper programs.

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