



FOOD SALES AT SCHOOL

When schools sell healthy foods and beverages to fuel their students, they send a strong, positive message about how much they value student health and success. Food and beverage sales to students during the school day outside of school meal programs, or after school at family or athletic events are often designed to raise funds by different school groups to support specific student needs and activities. All competitive foods and beverages sold to students on campus during the school day must meet the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Smart Snacks in School standards. The standards do not cover items served or shared at school (such as celebrations, snacks or rewards), nor do they cover evening, weekend or community events (such as family events or concessions at sporting events).

You Can Support Healthier Food Sales

Even if your school is meeting the national standards for competitive foods, there is still a lot of variation in the nutritional quality of allowable items. Consider the Smart Snacks standards to be the base or “floor” upon which to build your school’s own healthy guidelines for all food sales during and after school.

- **Review the Smart Snacks in School rule**, your school or district wellness policy and any state guidelines. If your state or district standards are stricter in some areas, those would take precedence. Use your district wellness policy as a platform to build change.
- **Survey snacks and beverages currently sold.** Find out where and when the sales are taking place and determine who is responsible at each location. À la carte lines are usually operated by district nutrition services. Concessions, vending machines, snack carts and school stores may be run by the school administration, nutrition services, PTO/PTA, student groups, booster clubs, a sports program or another group.
- **Approach groups in charge of food sales in a friendly and professional manner** to discuss the possibility of offering healthier choices. Build consensus by talking about the changes required and offer to help find products. Cooperative purchasing between groups — and even through the district nutrition services — may be possible if groups work together.
- **Work with the school or district business office** to identify which contracts need amending and begin collecting vendor contact information. Talk to your vending companies about trading less healthy options for more nutritious ones. Contract with companies that offer a wider variety of healthier choices. Cooperative purchasing between neighboring school districts may also be a way to increase variety and purchasing power.

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, à la carte lines (foods sold individually in the cafeteria), snack carts, concessions, school stores and other fundraisers are considered competitive foods.

The Smart Snacks in School Rule defines

the “school day” as the period from

midnight before and up to 30 minutes

after the end of the official school day.

State agencies may set a number of infrequent food or beverage fundraisers that are exempt from the standards as long as they do not take place in direct competition with breakfast or lunch programs in the food service area during meal service.

ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS

Tips for Success

Many schools and school groups across the country are switching to healthier food sales (or non-food fundraisers) without negative financial implications. Consider these strategies to increase your chances for success.

- **Involve students in the selection for new choices.** Taste testing and new product promotions for students, staff and parents will build excitement for the new foods and beverages on campus. Communicate the changes with students, staff and parents to keep them updated and gather feedback when possible.
- **Restrict the hours that school stores and vending machines are open and available.** Many schools do not allow access during breakfast and lunch service times; others block access to less nutritious items during the entire school day.
- **Price healthy items cheaper than less nutritious options.** 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.¹
- **Talk with local public health experts** about grants or other ways to fund healthy changes.
- **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!
- **Find more strategies to control the bottom line** from the Illinois Public Health Institute.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE MARKETING

Foods and beverages that are marketed at school during the school day also have to meet the Smart Snacks standards. Take a look around your school — are there posters, signage, coupons, vending machines, book covers or other advertising or marketing materials from food and beverage vendors? If so, make sure that they only show snacks and drinks that meet the standards.



Resources

¹See [ActionforHealthyKids.org/References](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/References)

Action for Healthy Kids Game On Activities

[actionforhealthykids.org/game-on-activity-library](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/game-on-activity-library)

Smart Snacks Standards, Healthy Vending, Food and Beverage Marketing at School, Host a Taste Test, Pricing Strategies to Encourage Healthy Eating

USDA Smart Snacks in Schools

fns.usda.gov/school-meals/tools-schools-focusing-smart-snacks

Illinois Public Health Institute

iphonline.org/center-for-policy-and-partnerships/controlling-junk-food-and-thebottom-line/



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