



STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE

# Marketing and Promotion of Foods and Beverages at School

Food and beverage marketing often appears throughout schools in the form of posters, vending machine fronts, in-school television advertisements, school newspapers, textbook covers, sports equipment, and scoreboards.<sup>1,2</sup> Many foods marketed in schools are of poor nutritional quality.<sup>3,5</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Institute of Medicine, and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that school districts implement policies and practices to promote foods and beverages that support healthful diets.<sup>1,6-11</sup> The following discussion highlights areas where policy opportunities exist, as well as areas where policies are well-established relative to food marketing, promotion, and messaging in schools. This brief summarizes the range of policy actions taken by public school districts from the 2011–2012 school year, from the Bridging the Gap (BTG) study. All policies were collected and coded by BTG researchers using a standardized method based on evidence-based guidelines and recommendations from expert organizations and agencies.<sup>11,12</sup> Complete details about how these data were collected and compiled are available in the companion methods documentation.<sup>13</sup>

## WHAT ACTIONS HAVE SCHOOL DISTRICTS TAKEN?

School district wellness policies about food marketing, promotion, and messaging in schools can impact students' eating behaviors.<sup>1</sup> As shown in Figure 1, during the 2011–2012 school year, the BTG study found that

- 71% of districts had no policy regarding the promotion of healthy food choices in schools.
- Only 5% of districts *required* and fewer than 25% *recommended* the marketing and promotion of healthy choices (e.g., pricing strategies to encourage healthy items, labeling healthy foods and beverages, posting nutrition education material in the cafeteria).
- 14% of districts *required* and 8% *recommended* restricting the marketing of unhealthful items on school grounds.
- 10% of districts *required* and 25% *recommended* prohibiting food as a reward or punishment for student behavior.

- 25% of districts *required* and 11% *recommended* strategies to engage parents and the community on wellness issues (e.g., sharing wellness and nutrition information on the district website, in school newsletters, or presentations that focus on nutrition and healthy lifestyles).

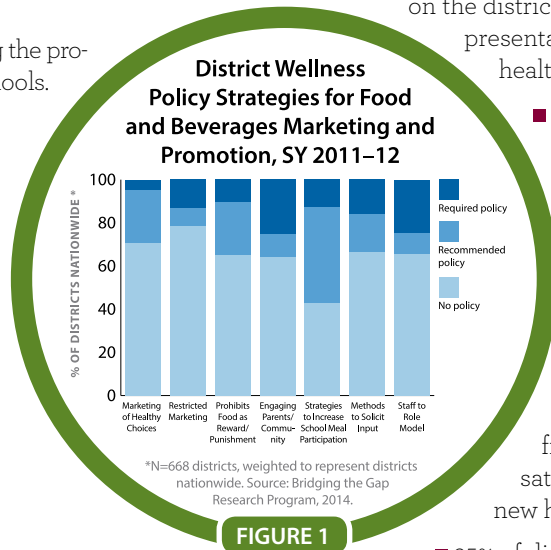


FIGURE 1

- 13% of districts *required* and 44% *recommended* strategies to increase participation in school meal programs (e.g., closed campus policies, promotional mailings, breakfast in the classroom, student input on menu selections, and “Grab and Go” or “Fun on the Run” options).
- 16% of districts *required* and 18% *recommended* methods to solicit input from stakeholders including student satisfaction surveys, and taste-testing of new healthy items.
- 25% of districts *required* and 9% *recommended* that staff be encouraged to model healthy behaviors.



## What Can You Do?

## MARKETING HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES

There are a number of evidence-based strategies and expert recommendation that can help improve marketing of healthy choices to children.<sup>1,6-11</sup> The actions below can help you implement these strategies and recommendations. See the Resource section at the end for links to documents and Web sites that provide additional information to help these efforts.

### STATES

- Educate districts and relevant state groups about the elements of a healthy school nutrition environment including the marketing and promotion of healthy foods and beverages.
- Provide training and technical assistance to

districts for revising wellness policies that address the marketing and promotion of foods and beverages.

- Assist districts with monitoring and reporting on the implementation of wellness policies.

### SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- Negotiate contracts with vendors to limit the sale and marketing of less nutritious foods and beverages in schools.
- Promote healthier foods and beverages.

- Prohibit the use of food as reward or punishment for student behavior, and provide teachers with a list of ideas for alternative nonfood rewards.

- Conduct an assessment of food and beverage advertising and marketing in schools.

- Review and revise the wellness policy to address the marketing and promotion of foods and beverages.

- Encourage staff and parents to model healthy behaviors.

- Provide the district wellness policy to parents and other stakeholders.

- Solicit input from students on items to include in the school meals.

## RESOURCES

- USDA Food and Nutrition Service. Local School Wellness Policies. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/local-school-wellness-policy>
- USDA Healthy Meals Resource System. School Nutrition Environment and Wellness Resources. <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/school-wellness-resources>
- The Smarter Lunchroom Movement. Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs. <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/>
- Center for Science in the Public Interest. Fact Sheet: Marketing of low-nutrition foods and beverages in schools <http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/schoolfoodmarketingfacts.pdf>
- California Project LEAN. Captive kids: Selling obesity at schools. An action guide to stop the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages in school. <http://californiaprojectlean.org/doc.asp?id=174&parentid=20>
- Rudd Roots Parents. Food Marketing in Schools. <http://www.ruddrootsparents.org/food-marketing-in-schools>
- Action for Healthy Kids- Healthy Fundraisers Tip Sheet. <http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/storage/documents/parent-toolkit/fundraisersf4.pdf>
- Bridging the Gap Research. School district wellness policy-related reports and materials. [http://www.bridgingthegapresearch.org/research/district\\_wellness\\_policies](http://www.bridgingthegapresearch.org/research/district_wellness_policies)

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Institute of Medicine. National Research Council. Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity? Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2005.
- <sup>2</sup> Commercial Activities in Schools. Report No.GAO/HEHS-00-156. Washington, DC: General Accounting Office; 2000.
- <sup>3</sup> Center for Science in the Public Interest. Food and Beverage Marketing Survey: Montgomery County Public Schools. Washington, DC: Center for Science in the Public Interest; 2008. Available at: [http://cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/MCPS\\_foodmarketing\\_report2008.pdf](http://cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/MCPS_foodmarketing_report2008.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> California Project LEAN. Food and Beverage Marketing on California High School Campuses Survey: Findings and Recommendations. California: Project LEAN; 2006. Available at: <http://www.californiaprojectlean.org/docuserfiles/SchoolMarketingReport2006.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> Molnar A, Garcia DR, Boninger F, Merrill B. A National Survey of the Types and Extent of the Marketing of Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value in Schools. Tempe, AZ: Commercialism in Research Unit; 2006.
- <sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. School health guidelines to promote healthy eating and physical activity. MMWR 2011;60:1-76.
- <sup>7</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Recommended community strategies and measurements to prevent childhood obesity in the United States. MMWR 2009; 58.
- <sup>8</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. Prevention and Treatment Childhood Overweight and Obesity: Policy Tool. Available at: [http://www2.aap.org/obesity/schools\\_5.html](http://www2.aap.org/obesity/schools_5.html)
- <sup>9</sup> Institute of Medicine. Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2012.
- <sup>10</sup> Institute of Medicine. Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2009.
- <sup>11</sup> Institute of Medicine. Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools: Leading the Way toward Healthier Youth. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2007.
- <sup>12</sup> Schwartz MB, Lund AE, Grow HM, et al. A comprehensive coding system to measure the quality of school wellness policies. J Am Diet Assoc. 2009;109(7):1256-1262.
- <sup>13</sup> Bridging the Gap Research Program. Methods Document for the CDC and Bridging the Gap Local School Wellness Policy Briefs. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/policy/pdf/methodsforwellnesspolicybriefs.pdf>

Suggested citation: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Bridging the Gap Research Program. *Strategies to Improve Marketing and Promotion of Foods and Beverages at School*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2014.