



436 14TH STREET
SUITE 1220
OAKLAND
CA 94612

T: (510) 433-1122
F: (510) 433-1131
E: CFPA@CFPA.NET

WWW.CFPA.NET

RECOMMENDATIONS ON SCHOOL NUTRITION

CALIFORNIA WORKING FAMILIES POLICY SUMMIT
FEBRUARY 25, 2010

INTRODUCTION

Over 30 percent of children (10-17) are overweight or obese in California.¹ The adverse health and developmental consequences of poor nutrition are well known and well documented. In addition, recent research estimated the economic cost of overweight and obesity in California at \$21 billion per year in the form of a rapidly escalating health care budget and decreased productivity.² Given the importance and scope of the childhood obesity problem, policymakers in California and across the nation have rightly focused obesity prevention policy in schools, one setting that offers many policy opportunities for encouraging healthy eating and physical activity.

Here in California recent legislation has been enacted to remove some of the unhealthiest foods from schools, including most sugar-sweetened drinks (such as soda), high-fat snacks (such as potato chips), and unhealthy fats. However, policymakers have not been as successful at advancing a positive policy agenda that promotes healthy options.

Water is the healthiest beverage available and is an essential nutrient. And, it is free to students when it comes from the tap. Proper hydration is necessary for mental acuity and physical performance. However, requirements for water availability on school campuses are known to be inadequate;³ and no requirements exist for water availability during meals, in cafeterias, or where students eat. A recent survey sent to school districts across the state found approximately 40 percent of respondents reported no access to free water during mealtimes. Substituting water for sugar-sweetened drinks can help children and adolescents consume an average of 235 fewer excess calories per day.⁴

Some school districts are successfully implementing innovative (and cheap) ways to get clean, free drinking water to kids. Federal, state, and local action can support and advance these efforts.

POLICY OBJECTIVE

Increase consumption of clean, free drinking water by students in schools.

Background

A recent report from the Surgeon General recommends that schools promote water consumption.⁵ Yet, a number of barriers to consumption of free drinking water currently exist. There is no expectation that water even be available in the places where students eat. In addition, existing infrastructure, such as a water fountain, may be inadequate for proper hydration, insufficient to meet the demand of the entire student body, and in poor repair, unhygienic, or inoperable. In certain communities, notably in parts of the Central Valley, tap water may be unsafe to drink.

Recommended Actions

- A. The Legislature should require schools to provide safe, free water in school eating areas. This requirement should go into effect in the beginning of the 2011-2 academic year. Schools unable to comply should provide a corrective action plan detailing how they will come into compliance within three years.
- B. Access and availability of free, clean tap water should be incorporated into the requirements of the federal child nutrition programs.
- C. Funding sources, including bonds, federal funds, and ARRA funds, should be identified that can bring needed infrastructure, such as water jets, dispensers, and filtration systems, to schools.
- D. Water quality monitoring should be strengthened, and schools should be included in such monitoring once per year. A notice should be placed in an easily visible location informing students, parents, and others of the safety of the school's water supply.
- E. Ensure that schools with unsafe water find alternative sources of water or install filtration systems.
- F. School districts should incorporate water consumption into local district wellness policies and work to implement these policies.

¹ "California: Children". Kaiser State Health Facts.

<http://www.statehealthfacts.org/profileind.jsp?cat=2&sub=14&rgn=6>.

² The "Economic Costs of Overweight, Obesity, and Physical Inactivity among California Adults – 2006". California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/PDFs/Costofobesity_BRIEF.pdf

³ "SFPD Advisory 99-02, Subject Building, Health and Sanitation Code Requirements – Code Compliance Responsibility". <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/sf/sfpd9902sanicode.asp>.

⁴ Wang YC et al. "Impact of Change in Sweetened Caloric Beverage Consumption on Energy Intake Among Children and Adolescents". *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, Vol. 163, No. 4, April 2009.

⁵ "The Surgeon General's Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation: 2010". U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/obesityvision/obesityvision2010.pdf>.