

Junk food should be banned in schools

Key Terms

Obesity
Diabetes
Surgeon General
USDA

Sources

Parents Advocating School Responsibility
<http://pasaorg.tripod.com/nutrition/archive.html>
Commercial Alert Junk Food Page
www.commercialalert.org/index.php/category_id/2/subcategory_id/36/article_id/124

Fact Set

- In the past two years, over a dozen states have considered legislation limiting the availability of junk food in schools, requiring vending machines be turned off during certain hours, or increasing the cost of unhealthy food to discourage its sale.
- Today's teenagers are almost 3 times as likely to be overweight than they were 20 years ago.

Arguments in favor of banning junk food

- A 2001 Surgeon General report found that 14 percent of American children are obese. This is compared with 4 percent in 1963. The report also noted that 300,000 people die each year from obesity-related illnesses or conditions made worse by obesity. Junk foods, high in fat and sugar, contribute to weight gain and obesity, which in turn puts children at risk for diabetes, heart disease and other health problems.
- One of the Surgeon General's recommendations is that schools provide healthier food options and restrict access to junk food in vending machines. USDA rules state that school lunches should contain no more than 30% fat, but the national average is 34%. It is estimated that high school lunches provide only 20% of the proper vitamin levels.
- Eating lots of sugary food makes students less able to pay attention in class or perform well on tests.
- Parents should monitor a child's diet, but while a student is away from their parents, the school must function as a parent and do what is best for the students. While the parents cannot be there to oversee a student's meals, a school should make sure those meals do not include junk food
- Schools should set a good example of nutritious eating for students. This would fit in well with nutrition curriculum in health classes.

Arguments against banning junk food

- Students will attempt to smuggle in junk food even if it is banned. Enforcing such a ban would force school officials to dig through lunchboxes, lockers and desks. This would harm students' privacy.
- It is up to parents to decide what food their children can eat. If children want to include a bit of junk food in their lunches, they should be allowed to do so.
- Junk food is not bad in itself – in moderation junk food can be part of a healthy diet.
- Students might be more likely to go off the school grounds to eat meals. Food from local fast food restaurants might be worse than school lunches, even if those school lunches contain some junk food.
- Students should be trusted to make decisions about their diet. Schools should provide information about healthy eating to the students, but leave the decisions up to them.
- If junk food is banned at school, students will continue to eat junk food before and after school.
- School districts facing smaller budgets because of state deficits rely on money from vending machine and soda contracts. Minnesota schools make about \$40 million per year from soft drink sales. The multi-million dollar exclusive pouring contracts offered to school districts by soda companies are an essential source of revenue for many school districts across the country.
- Schools can offer healthy options in cafeteria meals without completely banning junk food from the schools.

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Discussion Questions

- What counts as junk food?
- How well could a school enforce a ban on junk food? How does that affect a decision to ban it?
- How would this ban impact the rights of parents to decide students' eating habits?
- Should schools be responsible for student health? If so, how much?
- Why do schools have junk food on their campuses? How important are their financial motives?