

California Kelseyville Unified School District A Local Anti-pop Campaign

One big issue for Native American youth that we have seen for a long time is a gross increase in carious lesions when they reach the age of 14-15. While there are many risk variable associated with this etiology we noticed that the schools in the area made a huge profit off sugar drinks and soda that the children could start to purchase when they entered middle school. Children at this age now had the freedom to make choices in what they ate and drank without parental or teacher intervention. Many would use their lunch money to purchase sugar drinks, soda and packaged carbohydrates for lunch instead of eating healthy foods. We decided to do something.

You need to understand that this is a small community with the associated small town politics. We first gathered information regarding the sugar/soda drink consumption at the schools. We then gathered information on other schools that have replaced the sugar/soda drinks with healthy alternatives and discovered that their revenues from these drinks actually increased after placing healthy stuff in there. We also gathered information on alternative ways to raise money that were not time consuming (a point that the schools make is that raising money other ways is too time consuming).

All of this data and information was made into a report. I then met with the school superintendent and requested that an action item be placed on the agenda for the next school board meeting to replace sugar/soda drinks in the schools vending machines with healthy alternatives. We also asked that teachers stop selling candy, donuts etc out of their desks and stop giving candy as a reward for academic performance.

I didn't know exactly what the response would be from the board. I WAS surprised at the fierce opposition we encountered. We were careful not to insult the schools lunch program (they thought we were and were ready to defend that). Arguments were brought from both sides as well as from the student body and in the end the vote was 3-2 to remove the junk food. This took place at the beginning of the 2004 school year.

I was very surprised at the backlash this created. My daughter was in class shortly after the board meeting and the teacher told they couldn't go to science camp that year because I had taken away their revenue source (this was not true, the school was actually banned for a year due to poor behavior of the students the previous year). The teacher spent a whole hour on how we had messed things up for the children and the schools. A black-market was started in the high school. Enterprising students would smuggle in soda and sell it for a large profit (some actually thanked me for their success). The kids all complained. Parents were very supportive and thankful that someone stood up for the kids.

A follow up to the high school has been very positive. Kids are now drinking bottled water and it is now the "hip" thing to do. This all shows that change is hard and you need to be prepared for all arguments. It also shows that change can occur and people can and will adapt and that one person can make a difference in a community. I am still known as that dentist who took away the soda and am proud of it