



What does it mean to limit student access to competitive foods?

Limiting access means making it more difficult for students to obtain competitive foods and beverages. The term competitive foods refers to any food or beverage served outside of Federal meal programs, regardless of nutritional value. Some school districts limit student access to competitive foods in all schools, while others do so only in some schools (e.g., elementary schools).

Schools can limit student access to competitive foods by several means:

- Reducing the number of places where students can obtain competitive foods. For example, schools can restrict all competitive sales in the cafeteria or vending machines. Or they can reduce the total number of vending machines with competitive items or the number of competitive items sold à la carte.
- Changing the locations where foods and beverages are sold. For example, they can move a vending machine from just outside the cafeteria to a more isolated location.
- Prohibiting the sale of competitive foods during specified times, such as during lunch periods, from 1 hour before until 1 hour after lunch, or from the beginning of the school day until the end of the last lunch period.

Why should schools or districts limit access to specific foods and beverages?

The presence of food can be a prompt to eat. The constant availability of foods and beverages may increase the likelihood of impulse buying and contribute to overeating by some students.

Limiting access, however, can pose challenges to schools. First, limiting access may reduce revenues from food and beverage sales. Second, some people may oppose the approach because they believe that students should have access to a wide selection of foods. Third, reduced access to food outlets may require adjustments to meal programs to ensure that all students have enough time to eat.



What is the current situation?

Current U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations place limits only on the availability of foods of minimal nutritional value (FMNV) in foodservice areas during meal times.³ The Federal regulations allow States and local school districts to adopt stricter policies on access to competitive foods.³⁴ As of 2004, 23 States had done so, using a variety of approaches.³⁵

- Some States limit access to all competitive foods, while others only limit access to FMNV, and others only limit access to soft drinks.
- Some States limit access in all schools, while other States only limit access in elementary and/or middle schools.
- Policies in different States limit access for different times of day.
- Some States prohibit specific channels of distribution or outlets for competitive items (e.g., vending machines or à la carte sales).

Alabama prohibits sales of FMNV in all locations during meal service; New Jersey does not allow sales of FMNV on campus until the end of the last lunch period. Nebraska does not allow competitive foods anywhere on campus from a half hour before until a half hour after breakfast or lunch. Arkansas prohibits sales of food and beverages through vending machines in elementary schools. Louisiana prohibits à la carte sales in all schools.³⁵

More information about specific State policies on access to competitive foods can

be found on the following websites:

- CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health:
www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/shpps/index.htm
- USDA's Food and Nutrition Service:
www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Lunch/CompetitiveFoods/state_policies_2002.htm
- Action for Healthy Kids:
www.actionforhealthykids.org/tools/profiles.htm

How are schools and districts making it happen by limiting access?

All of the schools and school districts in the success stories retained some competitive food and beverage items, but restricted access to less nutritious items.

- Bozeman High School, Bozeman, Montana, eliminated student access to soft drinks during the school day in vending machines and the school store.
- In the Cambridge, New York, school district snacks are not available to kindergarten students, and students in



grades 1 to 4 may purchase only one item per day. At the high school, the only beverage machine turned on throughout the school day is the milk vending machine.

- Mercedes Independent School District, Mercedes, Texas, adopted a policy that prohibits the sale of FMNV in elementary schools, until the end of the school day in junior high schools, and until the end of the last lunch period in high schools.
- Nash-Rocky Mount Schools in Nash County, North Carolina, limits access to fat and sugar by controlling the portion sizes of dessert items.

- Richland One School District, Columbia, South Carolina, adopted a policy that prohibits the sale of FMNV in vending machines, snack bars, school stores, concession stands, and à la carte offerings during the school day in all district schools.

—See Quick Reference Guide, page 180, for a complete list of schools and districts that limited access to competitive foods.



