



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FOOD AND BEVERAGE MARKETING ON CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUSES SURVEY: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS March 2006

BACKGROUND

Marketing and advertising play a significant role in setting norms and encouraging behaviors, especially for children. Since the 1980s, the food and beverage industry has made children and adolescents the targets of intense and specialized food marketing and advertising efforts. As a result, children are exposed to multiple food advertisements every day, and foods marketed to children—from highly sweetened cereals to cookies, candy, fast foods, and soda—are predominantly high in calories, sugar and fat.

With youth, marketers have tapped into an audience that is particularly vulnerable to the messages and tactics of the food and beverage industry (Strassburger, 2001; Kunkel, 1995; John, 1999). Marketers have capitalized on this situation by using numerous marketing channels to reach children and adolescents. Commercial activities in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools have expanded during the last decade as a result of marketers' taking advantage of schools' financial vulnerability due to chronic funding shortages, coupled with marketers' wish to increase sales and generate product loyalty (Levine, 1999; Consumers Union, 1995). In-school marketing activities related to food and beverages include:

- Product sales
- Direct advertising
- Indirect marketing
- Market research

Because of the important role schools play in feeding children and teaching them lifelong healthy habits and the increasing emphasis the food and beverage industry puts on school-based marketing strategies, California Project LEAN (CPL) and the Public Health Institute (PHI) thought it was important to identify the types of food and beverage marketing and advertising that exist on school campuses. In the fall of 2005, using funds from The California Endowment, PHI commissioned Samuels & Associates to work with CPL to assess food and beverage marketing at 20 California public high schools.

KEY FINDINGS

Posters and signage:

- 245 instances of food and beverage related posters and signage found.
- 51% of posters and signage advertised food or beverage items or brand names.
- 60% of posters/signage for products were for foods or beverages that we discourage children from eating because they are high in fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sugar, and sodium and are low in nutrients.

Vending machines:

- 276 vending machines found in 19 of the schools assessed.
- Vending machines were found in high traffic areas: cafeterias and quads/courtyards.
- 65% of vending advertisements were for sweetened beverages; such as, soda and sports drinks.
- Water accounted for only 21% of all vending advertisements.

Equipment with logos or brand names:

- 60% of the schools used food or beverage coolers/display cases with corporate logos or brand names.
- 35% of the schools used cups, napkins and plates with food or beverage company logos or brand names.
- 71% of the logos displayed on equipment were for sweetened beverages such as soda and sports drinks.
- 8% of the logos displayed on equipment were for brand-name water.

School media:

- About half of the year books (53%) and school newspapers (53%) included food or beverage advertising. These advertisements were primarily for local restaurants.

School participation in food and beverage company marketing activities:

- Schools reported participating in food or beverage coupon distributions (25% of schools) or product giveaways (35% of schools) once or twice a year, or a few times a semester at most.
- 94% of these activities were conducted by companies selling unhealthy foods; such as, fast food, candy and soda.

School events funded by food or beverage companies:

- Nine schools (45%) had events (athletic events, social events, other extracurricular activities) supported at least in part by food or beverage companies.
- 93% of events were supported by companies selling unhealthy foods; such as, fast food and soda.

Food sales as fundraisers:

- All 20 schools assessed used food and beverage sales as fundraisers.
- Most common food and beverage fundraising items included: chips, cookies/cakes/pastries, sweetened beverages, water, juice and candy.

Corporate sponsored curricula and scholarships:

- 26% of schools reported using classroom materials or curricula created by food and beverage companies.
- 45% of schools reported participating in food and beverage company scholarship programs.

Policies regulating food and beverage marketing:

- Nine schools reported a district policy that addressed marketing, but none of these policies explicitly limited or banned marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages.

DISCUSSION

Given the growing body of evidence supporting the impact of food marketing on children's food preferences (Hastings, 2003; Committee on Food Marketing and the Diets of Children and Youth, 2006), schools must become aware of the types and intensity of food and beverage marketing on their campuses. This study found indications of food and beverage marketing in many locations throughout the high school campuses visited. Each of the campuses had multiple layers of marketing and advertising from visible signage and logos on vending machines and equipment to more subtle food and beverage industry presence in the form of donated products for fundraising or corporate sponsorships of activities or scholarships. This assessment found very little marketing for foods; such as, fruits and vegetables, whole grains, water and milk that are lacking in children's diets and that health professionals, parents and educators would like to encourage children to eat more of. Overwhelmingly, the food and beverage marketing found on the campuses came from companies and brands associated with foods that are discouraged in children's diets including soda, sports drinks and other sugary beverages, chips, candy and fast food. This finding is consistent with other reports that have found candy and snack food manufacturers, soft drink bottlers, and fast food restaurants, are among the companies that market most heavily in schools (Molnar, 2003).

Promotion of unhealthy foods conflicts with the California statewide legislation regulating nutrient content of school foods and contradicts the healthy eating messages central to nutrition education and to schools' mission to prepare children for productive lives as adults. Schools, with support from parents, health authorities, and other community stakeholders, should educate children about healthful diets through creation of environments that support healthy eating in all aspects including the products sold, the foods and beverages promoted through marketing and advertising, and the corporate sponsorship of activities and events.

Addressing food and beverage marketing on school campuses is a key component to creating healthy school environments. California schools are working hard to assure that foods sold on campus are healthy and meet nutrient standards for calories, fat and sugar; now we should assure that the food and beverage messages seen and heard by

California's students at school encourage health food choices rather than soda/sweetened beverages and junk food.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To minimize the potential negative impact of food and beverage marketing on students, schools should undertake the following actions:

- ❖ **Eliminate the marketing and advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages at school.**
 - Assure that all school-based marketing is consistent with or more stringent than state and district level policies eliminating the sale of sweetened beverages and unhealthy foods on school campuses.
 - New local Wellness Policies should include promotional activities that encourage students to consume fruits and vegetables, low-fat and non-fat milk and water.

- ❖ **Eliminate commercial influences that promote unhealthy foods and beverages in district curriculum, classroom materials and on campus.**
 - Review resources provided by outside sources, including curriculum and Channel One broadcasts used in the classroom, to ensure they do not promote unhealthy foods and beverages.
 - Prohibit any district curriculum from including identifiable brand names in the content of the curriculum. Require sponsored programs and materials to undergo the same review procedures and meet the same standards as other curriculum materials.
 - Restrict teachers from using identifiable brand names in their instruction unless they are found to be necessary to the lesson being taught.

- ❖ **Include consumer education as part of the curriculum.**
 - Adopt school-based curricula that teach youth media literacy skills, which teach them to be informed consumers of the media.

- ❖ **Set guidelines for business partnerships that restrict marketing and advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages.**
 - Encourage partnerships with business that does not include product advertising to students.
 - For school staff with the responsibility of entering into business partnerships, conduct trainings on the perils of marketing unhealthy foods on campus.

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