KIDS' SAFE & HEALTHFUL FOODS PROJECT

Promoting Safe & Healthy School Foods Now

news

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POLL SHOWS STRONG VOTER SUPPORT FOR NUTRITION STANDARDS FOR FOOD AND BEVERAGES SOLD IN SCHOOL VENDING MACHINES AND A LA CARTE LINES

Findings Come as USDA Prepares to Release Proposed Standards

WASHINGTON – Eighty percent of American voters favor national standards that would limit calories, fat, and sodium in snack and à la carte foods sold in U.S. schools and encourage the consumption of fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy items, according to a new poll commissioned by the Kids' Safe & Healthful Foods Project, a joint project of The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is expected to propose such standards in the next few months. It is anticipated that they will apply to snacks and beverages—such as sugary drinks, salty snacks, pizza, ice cream, and french fries—that can be purchased from vending machines, school stores, and cafeteria à la carte lines. Such items—which are sold in schools, but are not part of the federal school meal programs—are sometimes called "competitive foods," because they compete with school meals for students' spending. The standard that applies to them now is 30 years old and does not reflect current nutrition science.

"Healthier food in schools means healthier kids," said Jessica Donze Black, a registered dietitian and project director for the Kids' Safe & Healthful Foods Project. "Ensuring that all food available to students in schools is nutritious can reduce children's risk for obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure, and help them learn important lessons about staying healthy for life."

Research from USDA shows that, during a typical school day, four in 10 students purchase and consume snack foods or beverages. Data from Bridging the Gap, a research program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, show that such foods are often unhealthy because they are high in fat, sodium, and calories. Despite increasing national attention to the issue of childhood obesity, students' access to snack foods and beverages has increased over the past decade. According to USDA, the availability of vending machines in middle schools has more than doubled since the 1990s, and another study found that, as recently as the 2009-2010 school year, nearly half of the nation's elementary school students could buy unhealthy snack foods at school.

"Children eat a significant amount of their daily calories during the school day, so it is essential that all foods and drinks available in school contribute to a nutritious diet," said Robert W. Block, MD, FAAP, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics. "Strong nutrition standards will make significant improvements in the health of all our nation's children. We all benefit if kids stay healthy, because over the long term, healthier kids mean lower health care costs and increased productivity."

Additional results from the poll released today, conducted by the bipartisan team of Hart Research Associates and American Viewpoint, show:

- Eighty-one percent of voters are concerned about the issue of childhood obesity, including more than half (54 percent) who say they are very concerned.

When asked about the healthfulness and nutritional value of food sold in schools:

- Eighty-three percent of voters said they think that food sold in school vending machines is not really healthy/nutritious or only somewhat healthy/nutritious, compared with just 5 percent who think that vending machine food is totally/mostly healthy and nutritious.
- Sixty-eight percent of voters said they think that food sold in cafeteria à la carte lines is not really healthy/nutritious or only somewhat healthy/ nutritious, compared with 21 percent who think that it is totally/mostly healthy and nutritious.
- Sixty-eight percent of voters said they think that food sold in school stores is not really healthy/nutritious or only somewhat healthy/nutritious, compared with 10 percent who think that it is totally/mostly healthy and nutritious.

In January, USDA released separate new standards to improve the nutritional value of foods served as part of the nation's school *meal* programs—the first major update in 15 years. Schools nationwide will implement them beginning next fall, but they will not apply to snack foods and beverages.

The anticipated standards for snack foods and beverages will complement the meal rules and are expected to be released within the next few months. USDA will accept public comments for 90 days, as it did with the earlier school meal standards. The final standards for snack foods and beverages are expected to take effect in the fall of 2013.

"Schools are taking considerable steps to ensure the meals they serve are more nutritious than ever before, but if students are surrounded by less healthy beverage and snack options, we're not doing everything we can," said Donze Black. "If we want to succeed in turning around this country's obesity epidemic, ensuring that all of the foods and beverages sold in schools are healthy and nutritious is an obvious place to start."

Poll results come from a nationwide telephone survey of 1,010 registered voters conducted Jan. 11-16, 2012, by Hart Research Associates and American Viewpoint. Poll results are statistically representative of the opinions of voters nationwide and carry a margin of error of ± 3.1 percentage points.

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The **Kids' Safe & Healthful Foods Project** provides nonpartisan analysis and evidence-based recommendations on polices that impact the safety and healthfulness of school foods. This project is a collaboration between The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Learn more at www.HealthySchoolFoodsNow.org.

The **American Academy of Pediatrics** is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. (www.aap.org)