

NEWS

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SCHOOL BUDGETS, STUDENT HEALTH TO BENEFIT FROM HIGHER NUTRITION STANDARDS

*Pew, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Collaborate to Examine Impact of
Updated USDA Standards for Snack and a la Carte Foods and Beverages*

WASHINGTON — (JUNE 26, 2012) — Updating national nutrition standards for snack foods and beverages sold in schools could help students maintain a healthy weight and increase food service revenue, according to a [health impact assessment](#) (HIA) released today by the [Kids' Safe & Healthful Foods Project](#) and the [Health Impact Project](#).

The findings come as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prepares to issue policies requiring that food and beverages sold outside of federal school meal programs meet minimum nutrition standards. These items sold in vending machines, school stores, and cafeteria a la carte lines are often called “competitive foods” because they compete with school meals for students’ spending.

The projects, both collaborations of [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#) and the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#), conducted this HIA to examine how the USDA’s updated nutrition standards would affect student health. It also looked at the potential impact such changes could have on school revenue.

This HIA marks the first time such an evaluation has been completed to inform a new federal rule and is one of the most comprehensive scientific reviews ever conducted on competitive foods. Vetted by a wide array of experts, the peer-reviewed research includes an assessment of more than 300 studies and original economic data analyses.

“The evidence is clear and compelling,” said [Jessica Donze Black](#), director of the Kids’ Safe & Healthful Foods Project. “Implementing strong national nutrition standards to make the snacks and beverages our children consume healthier is something that schools and districts can afford. The USDA should do all it can to finalize and help implement strong standards.”

The HIA found that national nutritional standards for snack foods and beverages would reduce the consumption of these items during the school day. With many children eating



roughly half of their daily calories at schools, new guidelines will likely have a meaningful impact on student weight. For example, the spike in childhood obesity that occurred between 1988 and 2002 could have been substantially decreased by a modest reduction of just 110-165 calories a day.

The report also showed that many schools may be losing money from their food services departments when students buy snack foods instead of healthier breakfasts or lunches. School districts in states with nutrition standards for snack and a la carte foods and beverages saw total food-service revenues generally increase after the guidelines were put in place. This is largely because more children will purchase school meals if there are fewer items competing for their lunch money.

“School districts on average experienced an increase in food-service revenues after the implementation of standards for snack foods and beverages—even when controlling for factors such as the economic downturn, population size, demographics and poverty levels,” said Portland State University Professor Neal Wallace, who conducted the HIA’s economic analysis. “The increases in food-service revenues were found to offset any losses in sales of competitive foods, leaving overall food-related revenues virtually unchanged.”

All children would benefit from new nutrition guidelines, particularly those in vulnerable populations. Students from low-income families who participate in free and reduced-priced meal programs would be more likely to buy healthier foods after implementation of the guidelines. Likewise, these new standards would help black and Hispanic children, who tend to have a higher incidence of obesity and related diseases.

Based upon the rigorous research conducted by the HIA, the projects recommend that the USDA:

- establish nutrition standards for all foods sold regularly onsite during the school day and that are outside of the USDA meal programs;
- set nutrition guidelines for all beverages sold on school grounds; and
- adopt policies and practices that ensure effective implementation of the standards.

“This HIA looked at the health impact of higher nutritional standards in the context of the significant financial challenges that schools face already,” said [Aaron Wernham, M.D.](#), director of the Health Impact Project. “We found that schools can afford to do the right thing. School districts with healthier snack food and beverage policies also tend to do better financially. It is a win-win.”

The Kids’ Safe & Healthful Foods Project and the Health Impact Project worked with Upstream Public Health, a non-profit research and policy organization with experience in completing detailed assessments of health impacts, to conduct this assessment.

HIAs are part of a fast-growing field in the United States. In 2007, there were only 27 such studies. Today, roughly 200 HIAs have been completed or are ongoing.

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*The **Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project** provides nonpartisan analysis and evidence-based recommendations on policies 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 **Health Impact Project**, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, is a leading national initiative dedicated to promoting the use of health impact assessments in the United States. Learn more and see a searchable map of ongoing and completed HIAs in the United States at www.healthimpactproject.org.*