

Superintendent Perspectives on Food and Beverage Marketing in Schools

Background

Since the 2006-2007 school year, Congress and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have required that all school districts participating in federal Child Nutrition Programs develop and implement a local school wellness policy (LWP) that sets forth nutrition and physical activity goals for students.¹ In July 2016, the USDA issued a final rule² that expanded the LWP provisions, effective with the 2017-2018 school year. Notably, the final rule includes new standards for food and beverage marketing.

What Is This Brief About?

This brief highlights superintendents' awareness of the final rule on food and beverage marketing, perceptions of school marketing broadly, and the types of marketing that take place in their respective school districts. The findings in this brief were derived from a study that examined superintendents' experiences with LWP implementation, which are described in the report "[Superintendent Perspectives on Local School Wellness Policy Implementation.](#)"

Food Marketing Awareness, Perspectives and Practices

Superintendents were unaware of the LWP final rule's food and beverage marketing provision.

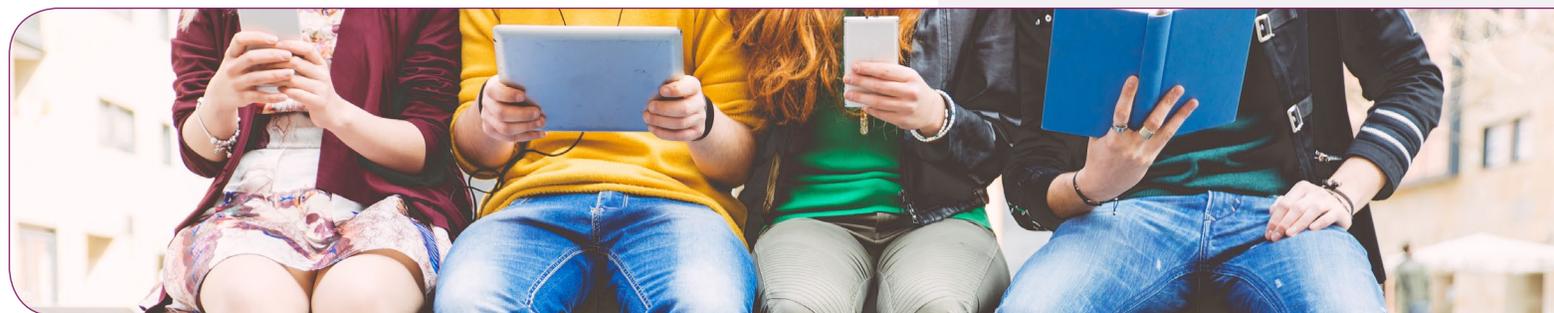
The majority of superintendents were not aware of the new food and beverage marketing provision in the LWP final rule. At the time of the study (March 2017), most reported that their school districts' wellness policy did not include a marketing policy.

WHAT IS FOOD AND BEVERAGE MARKETING IN SCHOOLS?



Food and beverage marketing is advertising and other promotions in schools which commonly include oral, written, or graphic statements made for the

purpose of promoting the sale of a product. The LWP final rule requires that in-school marketing of food and beverages is limited to items that meet federal *Smart Snacks in Schools* standards.³ *Smart Snacks* nutrition standards apply to all food and beverage items sold in schools during the school day on school campus. See the [Resources](#) section below for more information about these standards. If school districts want to adopt a stronger food and beverage marketing policy they can decide to: 1) only allow food and beverage marketing that meets nutrition standards stronger than *Smart Snacks* standards; or 2) not allow any food and beverage marketing.



Superintendents were concerned about food and beverage marketing in schools.

The majority of superintendents shared negative perceptions of food and beverage marketing in schools, and expressed concerns that the marketing boosted profits for food companies at the cost of student health.

I hearken it back to the late 90s when the cigarette companies were giving school districts posters, supposedly to discourage smoking. Holy cow, when you looked at those posters...both my counselor and I, I was a principal then, said **there's no way we're putting this up in the hallway.** It was a different way to market to kids.

Just to repeat it [food and beverage marketing] is **insidious and evil** and must be combatted.

...because they're getting a foothold in the school. If you want to make a lot of money, you get yourself in with kids, with parents and it's junk food.

We're not allowing that [food and beverage marketing] either. That's in part because of our policies about advertising in schools. We have to treat everybody the same, so **if you do one of those, you have to do them all.**

Superintendents reported a range of practices on limiting food and beverage marketing.

Although concerns about harm from marketing were common, superintendents reported a wide range of practices to restrict or permit food and beverage marketing in their districts. Some enforced strict restrictions, others focused on healthy food marketing, and still others did not have any restrictions. The latter superintendent highlighted the difficult choices that administrators must face when considering whether or not to permit marketing practices.

- Some allowed no food and beverage marketing
- Some only allowed healthy food and beverage marketing
- Some allowed food and beverage marketing if it was tied to an academic goal

Specifically in my district, we wouldn't participate in any of those programs because the marketing component **isn't attracting kids to food we want them to have...**We do not hang up or promote something with [a fast-food restaurant].

Obviously it is a marketing tool for [restaurant], but I just believe if we can get kids to read, it is important that to me especially K-1, 2 and 3 if you can read, you can conquer the world. If you can't read you are going to have a tougher time at it. Whatever we need to do to encourage children to read...so, yeah we are promoting [restaurant] pizzas, but yeah **it is a means to an end** for us that we are encouraging kids to read.

Methods Summary

This policy brief summarizes findings from a qualitative study of 39 Superintendents from 22 states who participated in focus groups at The School Superintendents Association (AASA) annual meeting in March 2017, followed by individual telephone interviews conducted between March and July 2017, with 14 of the focus group participants. Detailed information about study methods can be found [here](#).



Resources

National Wellness Policy Study

- www.go.uic.edu/NWPSproducts

Food and Beverage Marketing

- Food Marketing in Schools, a presentation available for download (<http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/food-marketing-presentations-for-download>)
- Restricting Food and Beverage Marketing in Schools, a fact sheet about local school wellness policies (https://www.changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/Restricting_Food_and_Beverage_Marketing_in_Schools-FINAL-201705.pdf)
- Food and Beverage Marketing: Model School Wellness Policy Language model school wellness policy language for limiting unhealthy marketing to students (https://www.changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/ModelLocalSchoolWellnessPolicyLanguage_FINAL_201705_0.pdf)
- Curbing Marketing to Students, a webinar explaining what types of in-school promotions are prohibited by federal law and providing practical tips for school districts on how to remove unhealthy food marketing (<https://www.changelabsolutions.org/publications/curbing-marketing-students>)

Smart Snacks in Schools

- A Guide to Smart Snacks in Schools (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/guide-smart-snacks-schools>)
- AHG Smart Snacks calculator (https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take-action/schools/snacks_and_beverages/smart_snacks/alliance_product_calculator/)

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REFERENCES

- ¹ Local 1. Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. PL 108-265; 118 Stat 729. 2004(108th Congress):Sec. 204. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-108publ265/pdf/PLAW-108publ265.pdf>.
- ² Local school wellness policy implementation under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, final rule. 81 Federal Register 50151. 2016. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-07-29/pdf/2016-17230.pdf>.
- ³ National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program: Nutrition standards for all foods sold in school as required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, final rule. 81 Federal Register 50132. 2016. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-07-29/pdf/2016-17227.pdf>.



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