

Sweet Deals:

School Fundraisers Can Be Healthy and Profitable

Virtually all schools in America raise funds to pay for supplies and equipment and to supplement school activities.¹ Most schools (76%) hold between one and five fundraisers per year, and one in four schools holds between five and 10 fundraisers per year, making school fundraisers a common, and often constant, part of students', staff's, and parents' lives.¹

Given the high rates of childhood obesity and children's poor diets, many schools are reconsidering whether selling low-nutrition foods is an appropriate way to raise money. In 2004, the U.S. Congress established a new requirement that all school districts develop and implement wellness policies that address nutrition and physical activity. As a part of their wellness policies, many school districts are setting policies to ensure that schools conduct only healthy fundraisers.²

Clubs, PTAs, athletic departments, school principals, and others may be reluctant to stop using fundraisers they have been conducting for years. Identifying and initiating new fundraising strategies can be a challenge. However, many healthy fundraising alternatives are available. Many of these are not only practical, but also can be profitable (see next page).

Unhealthy Fundraisers Undermine Student Health

Many school fundraisers involve the sale of unhealthy foods. A 2006 national survey found that nearly 50% of elementary schools, 56% of middle schools, and 67% of high schools sell chocolate candy and high-fat baked goods through fundraisers.³ Most fundraising activities center on unhealthy foods, such as bake sales, events held at fast-food restaurants, and sales of sugary drinks, chips, and other unhealthy snacks through vending machines or a la carte. On-campus food-related practices, such as the sale of low-nutrition foods in school fundraisers, are associated with increases in children's body mass index (BMI). One study found that every separate food-related practice that promotes low-nutrition foods in a school is associated with a 10% increase in students' BMI.⁴



Marketing in schools has become big business. Companies view school fundraising as an opportunity to make direct sales now and to cultivate brand loyalty to ensure future sales. Companies want to market their products in schools for a number of reasons, including that school children are a captive audience; schools are relatively uncluttered marketing environments in comparison to other venues, like television or the Internet; and school-based marketing adds credibility associating a company's name, brands, or products with schools and teachers, which are trusted institutions and role models for children. Companies market products in schools through a variety of fundraising methods, including direct product sales, redemption programs (e.g., Campbell's Labels for Education Program or General Mills' Box Tops for Education Program), selling brand name fast food in the cafeteria, school fundraisers at fast-food restaurants, and in-school contests.



Junk-food fundraisers undermine parents. Parents entrust schools with the care of their children during the school day. Selling junk food in schools undermines parental authority and parents' efforts to feed their children healthfully. When parents send their child to school with lunch money, they should not have to worry that their child will buy a doughnut and a sugary drink from a fundraiser instead of buying a balanced school lunch. This is especially a concern when children have diet-related health problems, such as high cholesterol or diabetes.

Junk-food fundraisers contradict nutrition education. Students should receive consistent messages about health throughout the school day, across all subjects, and in all school venues - from the classroom to the cafeteria to the gymnasium. Selling low-nutrition foods in schools contradicts nutrition education by sending the message that good nutrition is unimportant.⁵



Healthier Fundraising Alternatives Abound

Instead of:

Sales of foods and beverages of poor nutritional quality through a la carte, vending, or school stores.

Bake sales, pizza kits, candy, cookie dough, and doughnut sales. Bake sales may be popular with kids, but many parents dislike bake sales, which require them to purchase ingredients, bake an item to sell, and then give their child money to buy the products for which they have already paid.

Label redemption programs that include products of poor nutritional quality. Label redemption programs (e.g., Campbell's *Labels for Education* and General Mills' *Box Tops for Education*) are not effective fundraisers. For example, to earn a \$300 digital camcorder, a school would have to collect 27,850 Campbell's product labels. At \$1.20 per can of soup, students' families would have to spend \$33,420 on Campbell's products.

Fundraisers at fast-food restaurants. Fast-food restaurant fundraisers 1) market fast-food restaurants to children, 2) are image marketing for restaurants, and 3) drum up business on a slow night. While there are some healthy choices available, the overwhelming majority of choices at fast-food restaurants are of poor nutritional value. Few fruits, vegetables, or whole grains are available.

Try:

Setting nutrition standards for a la carte, vending, and school store sales. Of 17 schools and school districts that tracked income after switching to healthier school foods, 12 increased revenue and four reported no change.⁶ The one school district that did lose revenue in the short term experienced a subsequent revenue increase after the study was completed.

Sales of bottled water, calendars, stationery, greeting cards, fruit, holiday decorations/ornaments, jewelry, clothing, first-aid kits, personal care products, plants, flowers, spices, and many more items. Caution: Many popular catalogs that sell gift wrap also include chocolates, high-fat, high-sugar baked goods, and other low-nutrition foods.

Programs such as grocery store Scrip or gift-card sales, book fairs, cookbook fundraisers, scratch cards, and recycling of clothing, cell phones, and printer cartridges.

Events such as car washes, fun runs, walk-a-thons, bowl-a-thons, golf tournaments, sporting events, and raffles.

Examples of Profits from Healthier Fundraisers

Profit	School Fundraiser
\$1,000	A school sells 1,440 water bottles with the names/logos of 5 local business sponsors
\$4,500	A walk-a-thon with 100 student, parent, and family member walkers each raising \$50 in sponsorships
\$9,000	110 families buy scratch cards with discounts at local businesses
\$30,000/year	100 school families belong to a grocery store Scrip program



For more information about healthy fundraising, contact the NANA Coalition at 202-777-8387 or nana@cspinet.org, or see *Sweet Deals*, at: <http://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/schoolfundraising.pdf>

References

1 Krueger J. "Controlling Your School's "Fundraising Noise"" *Principal* 2007, September/October.

2 Bridging the Gap. *School District Wellness Policies: Evaluating Progress and Potential for Improving Children's Health Three Years After the Federal Mandate: School Years 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09.* <http://www.bridgingthegapresearch.org/_asset/r08bgt/WP_2010_report.pdf>.

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4 Kubik M, Lytle L, Story M. "Schoolwide Food Practices Are Associated with Body Mass Index in Middle School Students." *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 2005, vol. 159, pp. 1111-1114.

5 U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Foods Sold in Competition with USDA School Meal Programs: A Report to Congress January 12, 2001.* Washington, DC: USDA, 2001.

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