

## Competitive Foods and Beverages Success Stories

This document includes a variety of **success stories**<sup>1</sup> from schools and districts that **have improved the healthfulness of their food and beverage offerings while simultaneously maintaining or increasing total revenue from food and beverage sales**. These examples illustrate the variety of strategies and tactics schools and districts have used to achieve these goals based on their individual needs and issues. Some common factors of success and key take aways are listed on this page. Case studies begin on page 2.

### Factors of Success:

- Product Innovation – A proactive response from food and beverage vendors developing alternative products to meet student needs (favorable taste profile PLUS nutritious options).
- Providing Popular Items – When asked, students will identify nutritious foods that they want to buy and eat.
- Administrative Support – School administrators are willing to back changes in vending and student store offerings.
- Buy-in From Students – It is essential to consider student customers and to educate them on what is realistic and possible given the constraints of budget, space, and personnel.
- Student Involvement – Input from student advisory boards is key.
- Concerned Citizens – Parents, health professionals, community members, and a school board willing to address and discuss the “health versus profits” and “personal choice” issues related to the sale of non-nutritious beverages in schools is important.
- Flexible Vendors – Vendors who are willing to allow the school board and administration to change what is sold in the machines, even with an existing, exclusive vending contract.

### Take Aways:

- Students will buy healthful foods and beverages when these options are tasty, easily accessible and priced right.
- School food service and vending programs can continue to make money while offering healthful food and beverage options to students.
- Students, parents and communities support healthy school nutrition environments, and are willing to get involved in making changes.

### Words of wisdom:

*“Persistence is key when changing the nutritional environment in your school. Go into the process with energy and enthusiasm and armed with the knowledge that you are doing what's best for your students. They all deserve the right to healthier options. When making your case at school committee meetings or student meetings, bring healthy snack options to the staff and students. Let them eat while you plead your case. They'll realize that the proposed snacks and drinks can taste good and still be good for you!”*

Heather Erickson, School Health Coordinator, School Union #106

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<sup>1</sup> Success stories gathered from a variety of sources including: Making It Happen! School Nutrition Success Stories, Action for Healthy Kids, CSPI and California Project LEAN.

## Competitive Foods and Beverages Success Stories

### **North Community High School Minneapolis, MN**

#### **Strategies**

- School policy for timing/pricing of competitive beverages
- Addressing school beverage vending contracts
- Offering lower calorie, more nutritious beverages

#### **Key changes and results**

- Faced with alarming statistics about childhood overweight and obesity rates, Assistant Principal Bryan Bass of North Community High School re-evaluated the school's beverage vending practices. With the support of the administrative team, he contacted the district's Coca-Cola representative, who was willing to work with the school to provide healthier choices.
- North Community High School increased the number of vending machines from 4 to 16, stocked 13 machines with water or 100% fruit/vegetable juice, stocked two machines with sports drinks, and limited soda vending to one machine with limited hours of sale.
- The school also implemented competitive pricing. Water is \$.75, sports drinks and 100% fruit/vegetable juices are \$1.00, and soda and fruit drinks are \$1.25.
- A policy change now allows students to drink water in the classroom – prior to this no beverages were allowed in classrooms – and water machines were strategically placed in high traffic areas that could easily be accessed by students and staff.
- Students and staff have responded favorably to the changes. Students are seen drinking water all day long. The only negative comments the administration has received are complaints about the water machines being empty.
- As a result of these changes, North students bought far fewer cans of soda at school and the total number of beverages sold more than doubled, with water the number one seller. Vending profits increased by almost \$4,000.
- North has demonstrated that positive changes can be made to vending practices without losing revenue that support school activities.

#### **Keys to success**

- It only took one interested staff person at North High School to make the change – find a champion in a staff member, administrator, school nurse or parent.
- Students will react positively if they benefit from the change – youth are sensitive to price and policy changes.



## Competitive Foods and Beverages Success Stories

### **Old Orchard Beach School Department Old Orchard Beach, ME**

#### **Strategies**

- District-wide vending policy for competitive foods and beverages
- Addressing food and beverage vending contracts
- Offering more healthful foods and beverages
- Nutrition education

#### **Key changes and results**

- After a year and a half of planning and discussion, the Old Orchard School Board gave final approval to a Vending Machine Policy in July 2003. The policy was developed after reviewing the sample policies in NASBE's *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn*. Additional guidance was obtained from CDC's *School Health Index* and USDA's *Changing the Scene*.
- As a result of the policy, all soft drinks have been removed from vending machines and replaced by milk, water, and juices. Candy and high-fat snacks have been removed from vending machines and replaced by trail mix, pretzels, granola bars, and cereal/fruit snack mixes.
- In addition, school a la carte offerings have changed: they now include homemade pretzels and pizza, bagels, salads, fruit, yogurt, and string cheese.
- Schools have maintained positive relationships with local vendors, with an agreement to purchase nutritious beverages and snacks only. Vendors did not lose contracts and they continue to supply and service school machines.
- Since the changes were made, income from vending and a la carte sales has stayed the same.
- The School Department has an active nutrition education program that features a variety of special activities. Theme days, such as Fifties Day and International Week, feature celebrations with special foods in the cafeteria, music, costumes, and decorations – all designed to boost the morale of staff and students while using a nutrient-rich menu. Elementary students help plan menus for class projects. High school students work with the Foodservice Director on menus and help teach nutrition classes for elementary students.

#### **Keys to success**

- Collaboration between Health Services, School Health personnel and Food Services staff, along with support from the School Department Administration.
- Establishing a Nutrition Team.
- Fostering a positive attitude toward health by all staff.
- Being a site for the Healthy Maine Partnerships initiative which coordinates state and local public health activities, and having a full-time School Health Coordinator to address issues.

#### **Future plans**

- Continue to expand nutrition education curriculum.
- Add soup, sandwich, and salad options to a la carte sales at the high school.
- Publicize new vending machine policy in the local community.

**Competitive Foods and Beverages Success Stories****School Union #106**  
**Alexander, ME****Strategies**

- District-wide vending policy for competitive foods and beverages
- Addressing food and beverage vending contracts
- Offering more healthful foods and beverages

**Key changes and results**

- In February 2003, Maine School Union #106 established a district-wide vending policy. The policy states that the only items recommended for sale in school vending machines were three types of beverages (100 percent fruit or vegetable juice, low-fat or non-fat milk, and water) and twelve types of snack foods.
- Schools can sell other items but they must be approved by a school committee assigned to this task, and they must meet the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) definition of a healthy food (e.g., low in fat and saturated fat, limited amounts of cholesterol, and sodium).
- The policy discourages schools from signing beverage contracts that require the sale of items not approved for sale in vending machines. It also discourages the sale of food items for fundraising and encourages schools to raise funds through food sales of items approved for sale in vending machines.
- Following the adoption of the policy, all six schools in the Union have removed soft drinks and snacks that do not meet the definition of a healthy food from their machines. More healthful options have been added, including water, 100 percent fruit juices, breakfast bars, baked chips, and low-fat crackers.
- Changing the contents of vending machines in all six schools took five months, from the initial discussion to the replacement.
- Since making the change, the high school Student Council has reported an increase in revenue from some machines and no change in the other machines.

**Keys to success**

- The change was implemented as part of a Coordinated School Health Program, overseen by the School Health Advisory Council (which includes parents and teachers) and supported by St. Croix Valley Healthy Communities, a Healthy Maine Partnership.



## Competitive Foods and Beverages Success Stories

### **Green Bay Area Public School District Green Bay, WI**

#### **Strategies**

- District-wide nutrition policies and standards for competitive foods and beverages
- Addressing food and beverage vending contracts
- Offering more healthful foods and beverages

#### **Key changes and results**

- Food Services Director, Susan Baier, negotiated beverage changes for the district that comply with Alliance School Beverage Guidelines. As a result, the district's four high schools, five middle schools, and 25 elementary schools now offer 100% juice, water, Gatorade and Propel.
- The district is also making an effort to offer healthier foods in the vending machines. For the past 2-3 years, district schools have been selling only snacks that have 8 grams of fat or less and are approved by food services, such as baked chips. The district will continue to improve vending offerings gradually over the next few years.
- Daily a la carte revenue decreased, but school meal participation had increased. The revenue generated by the increase in school meals has more than doubled the lost a la carte revenue.

#### **Keys to success**

- The district has used this opportunity to focus on teaching students and staff about healthy items. The District offers a volunteer staff wellness program intended to help the 2,000 district employees be positive role models for students.
- Remember that you if you take things away, do it fully or you will spark internal competition.
- The high school Guidelines allow for more choice so that when they took away certain items, they were able to replace them. New options include low fat milk in various flavors, tea drinks that are not highly sweetened, vitamin waters and sports drinks.
- "We just needed someone to listen to us – the federal wellness policy mandate and the Healthy Schools Program have done that," said Baier. With those catalysts, she has been able to work at the district and school level to make changes thoughtfully and with the support of district administration.

#### **Future plans**

- Some school stores are still offering soda and non-nutritive beverages. They will work to amend the district wellness policy so that it also covers the items athletics and school stores offer in coming years.
- The district will continue to improve vending offerings naturally over the next few years.
- They are working to establish more healthful fundraisers as well.





## Competitive Foods and Beverages Success Stories

### Capistrano Unified School District Orange County, CA

#### Strategies

- District-wide nutrition policies and standards for competitive foods and beverages
- Addressing food and beverage vending contracts
- Offering more healthful foods and beverages
- Achieving buy-in from individual school sites and district administration

#### Key changes and results

- The district's beverage contract with Pepsi was expiring and they were preparing to go out to bid again when the school food service directors started talking with the purchasing department about offering only healthy foods in vending machines per food standards in CA SB 19.
- Because the vending machines were only at secondary schools, the food service coordinators met with high school representatives, who then met with high school principals who used the school vending machines as fundraisers for extracurricular activities. Information on childhood obesity was shared as well as a plan for improving the nutritional quality of vended items. The principals were supportive of the idea.
- The food service directors, in conjunction with the purchasing director, then presented their intent and justification to the school board.
- The school board unanimously approved a resolution to ban all soda in vending machines, which now offer only water, juices, fruit drinks and sports drinks that meet food and beverage standards in CA SB 19.
- Additionally, as of August 2004, the only snacks available in the school vending machines are those that meet CA SB 19 food standards.
- The students have been very positive about the changes that have occurred. Water has become very popular.
- There was an initial decrease in revenues, but now vending commissions are equal to what they were before the changes were made.
- The Associated Student Body is now meeting these same guidelines.

#### Keys to success

- Devising an action plan and getting buy-in from all those affected including individual school principals.
- Setting district-wide policy so all venues are subject to the same rules.
- The district has closed campuses which makes this easier to implement than districts with open campuses because it limits external competition during the school day.

#### Future plans

- Working with the PTA on alternative, "healthier" fundraisers.
- The district's efforts to promote healthy foods go beyond the vending machines. Food service directors are reviewing all foods sold through the district.



## Competitive Foods and Beverages Success Stories

### Vista Unified School District San Diego, CA

#### Strategies

- District-wide nutrition policies and standards for competitive foods and beverages
- District-wide management of food and beverage contracts (leveling the playing field)
- Offering more healthful foods and beverages
- Achieving buy-in from individual school sites and district administration
- Test pilot the program at one school site before rolling out district-wide

#### Key changes and results

- The Child Nutrition Services (CNS) program was trying to compete with less nutritious competitive foods and beverages, while keeping fiscally sound and striving to become the first “junk food-free” school district in the San Diego area.
- The asst. superintendent of business services and director of CNS consolidated district vending sales and began to manage contracts from other school groups. Contracts were taken over by CNS as they expired.
- Student interviews, taste tests and market availability determined what new products were offered.
- When CNS had control over the foods sold, they offered healthier competitive food options. Sodas were still offered but only in about 20% of the vending slots compared to 66% previously. This resulted in a decrease in soda sales.
- CNS piloted the program at Vista High School by purchasing and placing 17 vending machines on campus to serve the 3,500 students during one 33-minute lunch period. This helped feed those students who could not get through the long lunch lines.
- Owning the vending machines became expensive and required a fair amount of maintenance. To make the operation more efficient, machines are now supplied by an independent vending company which allows CNS to control the types of food and beverages offered. The vendor provides the security enclosures and the vending machines from preferred manufacturers. This allows a district that wants to “self operate” a vending program to get started without the huge initial capital outlay.
- Now the CNS department fills the machines and has complete control over product selection and price. The vendor can be used to secure mobile food service equipment which eliminates injuries associated with transporting heavy carts around campus and it gives CNS more service stations.
- In the first year, vending sales generated \$187,000. The high school received almost \$15,000 in commissions compared to \$9,000 under their old contract.

#### Keys to success

- The main challenge was overcoming concern from school officials who fear losing money for school programs as a result of the changes. Piloting the program at Vista High School provided evidence that more funds can be generated while selling healthier options.
- Another key to success was keeping prices lower than local stores. This prompted support for CNS to operate the student store, which went from losing money to making a profit of \$700 a day.
- Support from the local superintendent, the school board, school site administrators, and campus personnel: teachers, security, custodian and students was extremely important
- This strategy mandated change for the entire school environment at once which helped to level the playing field and remove the barrier of internal competition for funds. Now that contracts are centrally managed by nutrition services, machines can stay on all day, providing additional times and sites where students may purchase food and beverages.



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### Additional Successes

#### **East Middle School Great Falls, MT**

- Students started by selling healthier snacks (such as crackers, fruit muffins, and granola bars) at their school store.
- Based on the successful sales of healthy products, students have been able to influence what is served on the á la carte line and in vending machines as well.
- To advertise the changes, students developed daily nutrition announcements that have helped create a significant change in the overall attitudes of the student body toward healthier food choices.

#### **Appleton Area School District Appleton, WI**

- Citing concerns about rising child obesity rates, the Board of Education voted unanimously that schools in the district not be allowed to sell soda and candy to students in vending machines starting in fall 2003.
- The decision was informed by the experience of Appleton Central Alternative High School, which had transitioned previously to only selling healthy meals and snacks and had recorded reductions in student suicides, drop-out rates, expulsions, and drug use in the following years.
- Students carry water bottles to class and buy 100% fruit juice and low-fat milk from the vending machines.
- The district had expected its three high schools to lose \$20,000 a year in funding from vending contracts but broke even after students began buying the new items.

#### **Monroe High School Los Angeles, CA**

- More than two years ago, the Monroe High School had difficulty working within its existing beverage contract to eliminate sodas. The following year, with a new vendor, they stocked beverage vending machines with water, 100% juices, and sports drinks and eliminated low-nutrition foods with help from a grant sponsored by the California Departments of Education and Food and Agriculture.
- A marketing specialist was brought in to aid in the transition.
- Student nutrition advocates, the "Food Crew," taste tested new products that meet the CA SB 19 nutrition standards to identify options that taste great.
- The switch to healthier options initially resulted in a dip in sales; however, once the students became involved with marketing healthier foods, sales returned to and surpassed previous levels.
- Teachers report that students are more focused in class and behavior has significantly improved, with a 74% reduction in violent suspensions and a 24% reduction in all suspensions since before the change in school foods and beverages.



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### **Fayette County Public School District Lexington, KY**

- The district developed a request for proposal (RFP) for vendor contracts that paid higher commissions for more nutritious and lower calorie items, priced these items advantageously, and required an increase in the upfront payment to the school district from \$500,000 to \$900,000.
- The facades of all vending machines were changed to display pictures of young people being physically active.
- They saw a \$4000 increase in profits over the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter.
- These changes were the result of two years' worth of advocacy in support of healthier school vending.

### **Jones College Prep High School Chicago, IL**

- Twenty students participated in Club Balance, a pilot nutrition education class that met for two hours monthly over a three-month period.
- Club Balance students taste tested prospective foods, tracked their eating habits, learned how to use the USDA Food Guide Pyramid, and interpreted food labels.
- A bulletin board in the lunchroom displayed a large scale to represent making “balanced choices.”
- One lower calorie, more nutritious drink item was initially offered at a reduced price.
- A la carte sales during the project time frame had a modest decline; however, sales were better once all high-calorie, low-nutrient items were removed from vending machines.
- A focus group of 26 students found that 88% had noticed the healthier a la carte snacks and beverages, and that on average they purchased them twice a week.

### **Maine School Administrative District #22 Hampden, Newburgh, and Winterport, ME**

- The School Health Coordinator and the Director of Food Services worked together to implement a change in vending machine content.
- They wanted students to be actively involved in the decision-making process, and asked the high school Student Council to participate.
- The process began in the spring with a visit from the vendor that supplies the schools' machines, who brought healthy snacks and drinks for the students to taste test.
- The Student Council also surveyed the student body asking for input on what they might want included.
- There was no formal change in policy, just in practice, and soda, candy, and pastries were replaced with water, juice, and healthier snack foods.
- Students responded positively, and in a second survey, requested fruit and yogurt options. A refrigerated snack machine was added, including those selections.
- There was some concern about the drop in revenue, which did occur due to a smaller profit margin from the more expensive nutritional products. The addition of a refrigerated vending machine with yogurt, fresh fruit, vegetable juices, etc. helped to offset the loss in revenue.





## Competitive Foods and Beverages Success Stories

### **San Francisco Unified School District San Francisco, CA**

- The district eliminated foods at or below Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value, increased incorporation of fruits and vegetables, and offers water, 100% juice, and milk.
- They are currently addressing the challenge of school clubs' reliance on selling non-nutritious foods and beverages to fund their activities. The district has established an advisory committee that has developed a list of ideas for alternative fundraisers.
- Things are changing. For example, coaches who were funding their teams by selling sodas are coming on board with the nutrition policy. They are selling other things and they're going to the school site councils seeking other funds.

### **Sequoia Middle School Fresno, CA**

- Students were able to choose which healthier foods they liked.
- School officials found that sales increased when non-nutritious snack foods and sodas were removed because students were involved in the process of deciding which healthier foods would replace them.

