



What does it mean to establish nutrition standards?

Nutrition standards list criteria that determine which foods and beverages can and cannot be offered on a school campus. One approach to setting standards is to increase options, such as requiring that schools offer fruits or vegetables at all locations where snacks are available. A second approach is to limit options, such as stipulating that schools cannot sell foods with more than a specified number of grams of fat per serving, or cannot deep-fry foods. Nutrition standards can address a variety of issues as illustrated by Table 3.

Nutrition standards are often incorporated into the written policies of a State agency, school district, or school. They can be mandatory or voluntary. When appropriate, they can be accompanied by information on brand name products that meet the nutrition standards.

Table 3. Options for nutrition standards

Issue	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Location	Food and beverages anywhere on campus	Foods and beverages in specified settings, e.g., school parties	
Grade level	All grades	Specified grade levels	
Time	Entire school day	Part of the school day	
Foods and beverages restricted	<u>All</u> competitive foods and beverages or all foods of minimal nutritional value	<u>Specified</u> items such as carbonated soft drinks, snack cakes, or deep-fried foods	<u>Specified items based on nutrient criteria:</u> e.g., limits on the amount of fat, saturated fat, added sugars, or sodium
Portion size	Beverages, e.g., maximum 12 ounces	Snack items, e.g., maximum one serving size	À la carte items, e.g., no larger than Federal meal specifications

Why develop nutrition standards?

With today’s complex food supply, it can be challenging to identify the most appropriate food and beverage options. Standards make it easier by providing objective criteria that can be applied consistently.

Setting nutrition standards reflects the “healthy choice” perspective that schools

should give students a wide array of choices that are all nutritious. In contrast, the “personal choice” perspective holds that schools should give students a wider variety of choices, similar to those they will find in stores, and educate them to make wise choices. Table 4 compares the healthy-choice and personal-choice view of school foods and beverages.

Table 4. What types of foods should be accessible to students?

Healthy-choice perspective	Personal-choice perspective
<p>Schools have a responsibility to provide only those foods that are consistent with the education they provide.</p>	<p>It is pointless to prohibit the sale of certain foods and beverages, because students can get those items outside of school.</p>
<p>Offering only nutritious choices can help reinforce a positive nutrition message every day of school.</p>	<p>Students will learn to make better decisions in their day-to-day lives if they are provided with a wide assortment of food choices.</p>
<p>Research shows that children, especially young children, are less likely to make nutritious choices when other choices are available.</p>	<p>There is no such thing as a “bad” food or beverage. All foods can fit into a healthy eating pattern; therefore, there is no reason to prohibit the availability of certain foods.</p>
<p>The current state of children’s eating habits proves that they could benefit from assistance that guides their eating choices.</p>	<p>Banning specific food and beverage items in schools is counter-productive; students will see them as “forbidden fruit” and be more likely to desire them.</p>
<p>Schools establish students’ course of study, dress codes, and rules for behavior. These decisions are based on educational principles; the same should apply to food and beverage options.</p>	<p>Prohibiting less nutritious items from schools will have little impact on students’ overall dietary intake, but will decrease school revenues raised from food and beverage sales.</p>
<p>Even small improvements in students’ eating habits can have an important impact on their health. Young people will choose nutritious products when they are presented in appealing, attractive packages and are appropriately priced. Schools can continue to make money by selling these products.</p>	

What is the current situation?

The CDC’s School Health Policies and Programs Study (SHPPS) 2000³⁶ found that few States or school districts had specific nutrition standards.



Table 5. Percentage of States and school districts with nutrition standards, by setting (SHPPS 2000)³⁶

Setting	States requiring schools to offer fruits and vegetables (percent)	States requiring schools to prohibit “junk foods”* (percent)	Districts requiring schools to offer fruits and vegetables (percent)	Districts requiring schools to prohibit “junk foods” (percent)
À la carte during breakfast or lunch	0	20.0	19.4	23.1
At concession stands	0	2.0	0.5	1.4
At meetings attended by students’ family members	0	0	0.8	0.5
At staff meetings	0	0	0.2	0.5
At student parties	0	2.0	0.2	1.4
In afterschool or extended day programs	4.0	8.0	6.7	7.3
In school stores, canteens, or snack bars	0	6.0	3.7	3.8
In vending machines	0	8.0	1.7	4.1

* Foods that provide calories primarily through fats or added sugars and have minimal amounts of vitamins and minerals.



At the State level, the most comprehensive nutrition standards have been developed by West Virginia, California, and Texas. The West Virginia Board of Education prohibits the sale or serving of the following foods and beverages at school during the school day (e.g., between the arrival of the first child at school and the end of the last scheduled instructional period):

- Chewing gum, flavored ice bars, and candy bars,
- Foods or drinks containing 40 percent or more, by weight, of sugar or other sweeteners,
- Juice or juice products containing less than 20 percent real fruit or vegetable juice, and
- Foods with more than 8 grams of fat per 1-ounce serving.

In addition, soft drinks are prohibited at elementary and middle schools; soft drinks may be sold in high schools but not during breakfast and lunch periods. The complete West Virginia policy can be found at <http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p4321.1.html>. A California law passed in 2003 ([www.leginfo.](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/bill/sen/sb_0651-0700/sb_677_bill_20030917_chaptered.pdf)

[ca.gov/pub/bill/sen/sb_0651-0700/sb_677_bill_20030917_chaptered.pdf](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/bill/sen/sb_0651-0700/sb_677_bill_20030917_chaptered.pdf)) allows elementary, junior high, and middle schools to sell only “healthy” beverages. Effective July 2004, the only beverages that can be sold in those schools during the school day (e.g., from half an hour before school begins to half an hour after school ends) are:

- Water
- Milk
- 100% fruit juice
- Fruit-based drinks with no less than 50% fruit juice and no added sweeteners.

In addition, middle and junior high schools can sell electrolyte replacement beverages with no more than 42 grams of added sweetener per 20-ounce serving.

A previously passed California law required elementary schools to adopt strong nutrition standards (www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/01-02/bill/sen/sb_0001-0050/sb_19_bill_20011014_chaptered.pdf). However, it is not clear whether these standards will actually be implemented, because implementation is conditional upon increases in State reimbursement rates for school meal programs that have not yet been approved. A report of the expert panel that influenced California’s school nutrition standards legislation can be found at www.publichealthadvocacy.org/resources/resources.html.

In March 2004, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) issued the Texas Public School Nutrition Policy to promote a healthier environment in schools. Effective August 1, 2004, all Texas public schools

participating in the Federal child nutrition programs (National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program and the Afterschool Snack Program) must comply with the new nutrition policy. The policy affects all grade levels and sets limits on Foods of Minimal Nutrition Value (FMNV), competitive foods, types and frequency some foods can be offered, portion sizes, and beverage contracts.

www.agr.state.tx.us/foodnutrition/policy/food_nutrition_policy.pdf.

Three state agencies in North Carolina—the North Carolina Division of Public Health, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service—collaborated to create *Eat Smart Move More: North Carolina's Recommended Standards for All Foods Available in School*. The Standards were released in May 2004 and are voluntary, sequential, and flexible. They address foods and beverages found in traditional cafeteria meals, à la carte items, vending machines drinks and snacks, and foods and beverages served in afterschool programs and at school functions.

(www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/index2.php)

Cities and counties across the Nation also are adopting school nutrition standards. In 2003, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), which had previously adopted a policy prohibiting the sale of soft drinks in LAUSD schools, adopted more comprehensive nutrition standards

(www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/board/secretary/html/agendas/mt/mt10-28-03.html).

In Philadelphia and San Antonio, community-based coalitions have developed optional school nutrition standards. Philadelphia's standards (www.thefoodtrust.org/pdfs/snpolicy.pdf), which are being pilot-tested in a number of city schools, are similar to those of West Virginia. San Antonio's standards (www.healthcollaborative.net/assets/pdf/vendingcriteria.pdf), which were developed as part of the Fit City/Fit Schools campaign, identify specific foods and beverages that should be excluded from schools and two categories that can be included: healthier (e.g., 5 or fewer grams total fat per serving) and healthiest (e.g., 3 or fewer grams total fat per serving).

In February 2004, the Philadelphia School District's School Reform Commission (SRC) gave final approval to a new District-wide Beverage Policy that eliminates the sale of all carbonated sodas to School District of Philadelphia elementary, middle, and high school students starting July 1, 2004.



The new beverage policy will only allow juices that are 100% fruit juice; drinking water with no artificial sweeteners, flavorings, or colors; milk and flavored milk drinks to be sold in District schools. The policy applies to the sale of beverages from vending machines and over-the-counter locations www.marketplaceforthemind.state.pa.us/m4m/cwp/view.asp?a=3&q=150573.

How are schools making it happen with nutrition policies and standards?

Following are some of the school districts that developed nutrition standards.

- The Austin Independent School District in Texas prohibited the sale of FMNV in all district schools, including high schools; encouraged schools to stock vending machines with healthier alternatives; and prohibited fried, high-fat chips.
 - The Grand Forks School Board in North Dakota passed a policy on “Nutrition Education Practices” mandating that school nutrition environments be in line with health messages taught in classrooms. One school in the district, Ben Franklin Elementary School, adopted a guideline requiring that only fruits and vegetables could be eaten by students as snacks in the classroom.
 - Mercedes Independent School District in Texas prohibited the sale of FMNV and high-fat snack foods during the school day in elementary and junior high schools. These changes were part of a comprehensive policy, the Student Nutrition/Wellness Plan, which covers all components of a healthy school nutrition environment.
 - Old Orchard Beach School Department and School Union #106 in Maine adopted nutrition standards for vending machines that resulted in the removal of soft drinks, candy, and high-fat snacks and the addition of beverages and snack items lower in added fats and sugars.
 - Richland One School District in Columbia, South Carolina prohibited the sale of FMNV to students in all district schools during the school day and provided a list of recommended snacks and beverages.
- See Quick Reference Guide, page 181, for a list of all schools and school districts that developed nutrition policies and standards.

