

Funded by and prepared for:



Competitive Foods

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Children's easy access to unhealthy foods at school, as well as in their communities, has contributed to climbing rates of childhood overweight and obesity.

School Foods

WHEN ADULTS REMINISCE ABOUT THE FOOD THEY ATE AT SCHOOL, MOST THINK OF THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH—THE LITTLE PLASTIC TRAY WITH COMPARTMENTS TO NEATLY CONTAIN THE MAIN DISH, SIDES OF VEGETABLES AND FRUIT, AND THE OBLIGATORY SMALL CARTON OF MILK.

Today, school food is something very different. For the majority of middle and high schoolers, lunch is grabbed from a vending machine, snack bar or school store, and probably contains chips, candy or pizza—all washed down by a sugary drink. Children's easy access to unhealthy foods at school, as well as in their communities, has contributed to climbing rates of childhood overweight and obesity.

As parents, educators, health care providers and public health professionals become more aware of and concerned about unhealthy foods in schools, a movement has formed to create healthier school food environments by setting standards for the nutritional content of food sold outside of the school meal program, called "competitive foods." Currently, competitive foods are not regulated by the federal government,

unlike the federally regulated school breakfast and lunch programs; as a result, the most common competitive food items—chips, candy, and cookies—are high in calories, fat, saturated fat and sugar.

It has been left to states and local school districts to institute policies that set nutrient standards for competitive foods. California has been at the forefront of efforts to create healthy school food environments. In fall 2005, California passed SB 12, legislation setting nutrient standards for all competitive foods sold on public school campuses from elementary through high school. SB 12 will go into effect in July 2007.

This report describes the competitive food landscape in 40 California public secondary schools; elementary schools



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are not included because they tend to have very few, if any, foods sold outside of the school meal programs. The report describes the types of food items available to middle and high school students as well as how well they match the nutrient standards defined in California's SB 12 legislation. The information presented here can be used to inform parents, policymakers, school officials and others interested in making schools healthier places for students.

Competitive Foods in Many Locations on Campus

Competitive foods were found on all 40 of the middle and high school campuses assessed. These foods were available to students in multiple locations and at multiple times throughout the school day. The most common sales venues for competitive foods included food vending machines (found in 52 percent of the schools visited), food service venues such as cafeterias, snack bars and snack carts (found in 80 percent of the schools visited), and school stores (found in 60 percent of the schools visited)—some of which carry almost as many items as a typical convenience store. High schools provided their students with the greatest access to competitive foods. Nine times more high schools than middle schools had food vending machines and three times more high schools had a school store compared to middle schools.

Competitive foods are offered for sale at multiple times throughout the school day. Vending machines make snack foods available at all hours of the school day, unless they are locked or turned off. Snack bars and school stores may sell food before school, during morning break and lunch, and after school.

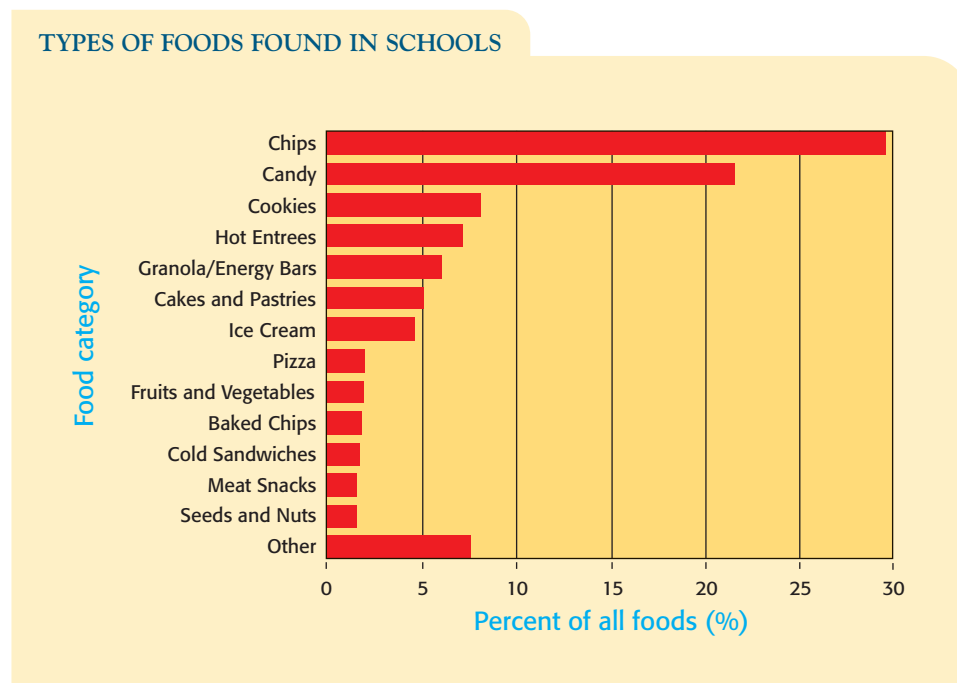
Wide Variety of Choices

2,585 competitive food items were catalogued at the 40 schools visited. High schools offered students a wider variety of competitive items. Of the food items catalogued, 23 percent were found at the 18 middle schools and 77 percent were found at the 22 high schools. Although many different types of items were found, the majority of the competitive foods sold fell into a few categories. The most common were chips, which accounted for nearly one-third (30%) of the competitive foods sold, and candy, which accounted for over one-fifth (22%) of the competitive items available (Figure 1). The hot entrée category, which accounted for 7 percent of the competitive foods, includes a wide variety of items: hot dogs, chicken, Mexican and Chinese foods, and hot breakfast items. The average price of a competitive item ranged from \$0.34 for a fruit or vegetable item to \$1.85 for a sandwich or entrée salad. Statistical analysis of pricing found that higher fat and sugar items tended to have lower prices.



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FIGURE 1
Top 10 competitive food categories in middle and high schools



Applying Nutrient Standards

The standards set forth in California’s SB 12 legislation put limits on a number of nutrients to assure that the most unhealthy foods, those highest in calories, fat, saturated fat and sugar, are not allowed for sale on school campuses. According to the California SB 12 nutrient standards for secondary schools, competitive foods must meet the following:

Entrees

- Not more than 400 calories
- No more than 36% total calories from fat

Snacks and Side Dishes

- Not more than 250 calories
- Not more than 35% total calories from total fat
- Not more than 10% calories from saturated fat
- Not more than 35% weight from sugar

The nutrient profiles of the competitive food items were compared to the California standards. More than one in four competitive items (26%) exceeded the calorie limits; categories with the highest proportion of foods exceeding the calorie limit included

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trail mix, cakes and pastries, and French fries. More than half (55%) of the competitive items exceeded the fat limit. Categories with most items exceeding the fat limit included: French Fries, trail mix, chips and entrée salads. Just under a third (31%) of competitive foods exceeded the saturated fat limit; these were likely to be items in the ice cream, French fries, cookies, seeds and nuts, and candy categories. Almost one-third (31%) of the competitive items exceeded the sugar limit; high-sugar items were most likely to be candy, cookies, granola/energy bars, and cakes and pastries (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2
Percentage of competitive foods exceeding the SB 12 nutrient standards

COMPETITIVE FOODS EXCEEDING STANDARDS	
Nutrient Standard	Percentage of Competitive Foods Exceeding the Nutrient Standard
Calories (snacks 250, entrees 400)	26%
Total Fat (snacks ≤35% of calories, entrees ≤36% of calories)	55%
Saturated Fat (≤10% of calories)	31%
Sugar (≤35% weight)	31%

Overall Adherence to California SB 12 Nutrient Standards

Competitive food items were analyzed to assess how well the foods offered on the 40 secondary school campuses matched the SB 12 standards. Although California secondary schools are not required to adhere to the state nutrient standards until 2007, this analysis provides an assessment of the healthfulness of the competitive food items available and illustrates the magnitude of change schools need to undertake when implementing the SB 12 standards. Overall, adherence to SB 12 was lower in high schools where 19 percent of foods adhered as compared with middle schools where 29 percent of foods adhered. Across middle and high schools, competitive foods sold by food services (in cafeterias, snack bars and snack carts) had the highest rate of compliance with the SB 12 standards—30 percent. One-fifth of all items found in school stores (20%) adhered to the standards, and only 15 percent of items sold through vending machines adhered to the standards.

Adherence to the California nutrient standards was compared between districts without a district wide nutrition policy and districts with a nutrition policy. Districts with a



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nutrition policy took it upon themselves to develop, adopt, and implement a policy governing competitive foods prior to the passage of state legislation; these districts are among the California's most highly motivated districts to improve school foods. Some district policies are less stringent than the state standards and others are more stringent than the state standards. In the 23 districts without a nutrition policy, 13 percent of competitive foods adhered to the California Nutrient Standards (Figure 3). In the 17 districts with a nutrition policy, 36 percent of competitive food items adhered to state standards (Figure 3). Although adherence is still quite low in districts with a policy, it is almost three times higher than the districts with no policy.

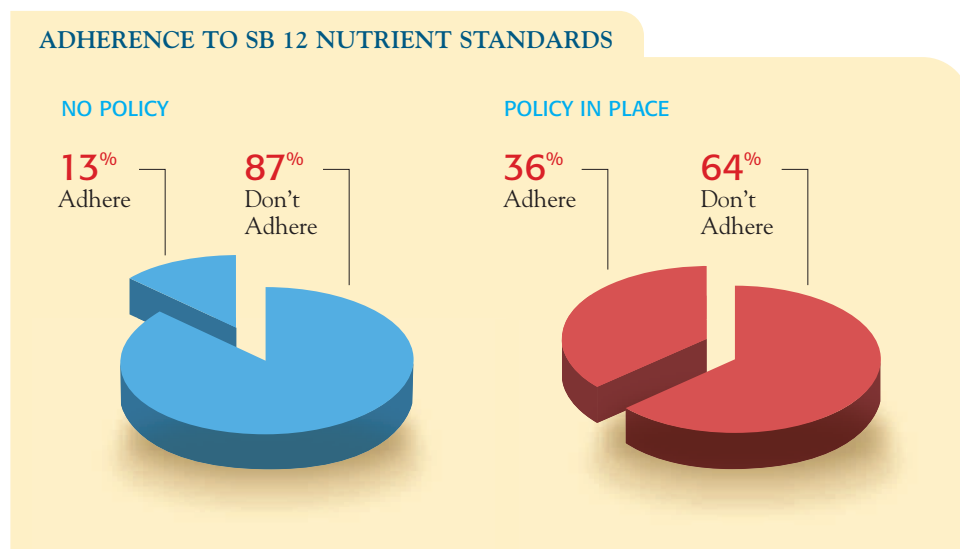
Conclusion

Competitive foods provide middle and high school students with easy access to a wide variety of snack foods during the school day. The majority tend to be high fat and high-sugar items that provide substantial calories and very few nutrients. Middle and high schools will have to make significant changes to the competitive foods currently available in order to comply with California's SB 12 nutrient standards. This assessment also revealed how difficult changing the competitive food landscape can be—even in highly motivated districts that had adopted their own policy, the majority of competitive foods sold did not meet the standards.

Although adherence is still quite low in districts with a competitive food policy, it is almost three times higher than the districts with no policy.

FIGURE 3

Adherence to SB 12 nutrient standards in districts with and without a competitive foods policy





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The following policy recommendations would assure that California secondary schools are creating healthy environments that provide students with healthy foods.

Policy Recommendations:

- Ensure 100 percent compliance with California SB 12 standards. Encourage school districts to adopt the standards as soon as possible to start creating healthy food environments for students now.
- Support school district implementation of the nutrient standards through trainings and consultation on identifying healthy competitive foods that meet standards and appeal to students.
- Increase/enhance the variety of healthy foods to ensure more choices for students.
- Price the healthiest foods cheaper than less healthy foods.
- Encourage students to purchase healthier foods by eliminating all advertising and marketing of unhealthy foods that don't meet nutrient standards.



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Top 50 Foods **ADHERING** to SB 12 Standards

Bagel Chips - New York Style Mini Garlic Bagel Chips
Bagel - Lender's with Cream Cheese
Bagel - Sara Lee
Baked Chips - Classics Potato Crisps - Sour Cream and Onion
Beef Jerky - Enjoy-Hot, Teriyaki or Old Fashioned
Beef Jerky - Werner - Honey Glazed
Beef Jerky - Werner - Jalapeno
Beef Jerky - Werner - Original Medallions
Burrito - Jose Ole - Fiesta Bean and Cheese
Cheese - Organic Valley - Stringles String Cheese
Chicken - Goldkist Farms Chicken Patty
Chow Mein - Tops - Chicken Chow Mein
Concha De Vanilla Pan Dulce
Cookie - Basil's Animal Snackers
Cookies - Health Valley - Low Fat Chocolate Tart
Cookies - Nabisco - Teddy Grahams
Cookies - Tom's - Animal Crackers
Corn Nuts - Chile Picante
Corn Nuts - Original
Corn Nuts - Ranch
Corn Nuts - Salsa Jalisco
Crackers - Keebler Elfin
Cream Cheese - Block & Barrel
Energy Bar - Clif - Crunchy Peanut Butter
French Toast - Krusteaz - Cinnamon
Frozen Yogurt - California - Nonfat Chocolate Chip
Frozen Yogurt - California - Nonfat Cookie Dough
Frozen Yogurt - California - Nonfat Cookies and Cream
Frozen Yogurt - California - Nonfat Jaw Busters Cool Cup
Frozen Yogurt - California - Nonfat Mint Chip
Frozen Yogurt - California - Nonfat Peaches and Cream
Frozen Yogurt - California - Nonfat Squirmy Wormy Cool Cup
Frozen Yogurt - California - Nonfat Strawberry and Cream
Frozen Yogurt - California - Nonfat Strawberry Mudslide Cool Cup
Frozen Yogurt - California - Nonfat Sundae Cookie Dream Cool Cup
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Brown Sugar
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Crunchy Banana Nut
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Crunchy Granola Honey and Oats
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Honey And Oats
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Maple Brown Sugar
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Peanut Butter
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Peanut Granola Bar
Gum - Carefree Sugarless
Hamburger - Donlee Farms Beef Burger
Nuts - Blue Diamond - Smokehouse Almonds
Pizza - Tony's - Cheese/Cheese Substitute Pizza With Reduced Fat
Popsicle - Darigold - Cherry Pineapple Super Pop
Pretzels - Rold Gold Classic Tiny Twists
Pretzels - Tom's - Gold Rush - Baked Mini Pretzels
Soup - Campbell - Tortilla



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Top 50 Foods **NOT ADHERING** to SB 12 Standards

Baked Chips - Cheetos - Flamin' Hot Crunchy
Candy - Harmony - Gummy Bears
Candy - Starburst - Fruit & Crème (Pink)
Candy - Starburst - Original
Chips - Lay's - Classic Potato
Chips - Lay's - Sour Cream & Onion
Chips - Ruffles - KC Masterpiece Mesquite BBQ Flavor
Chips - Ruffles - Original
Chips - Tim's - Hot Jalapeno
Cookie - Ruger - Vanilla Flavored Wafer
Cookies - Nabisco - SnackWells - Crème Sandwich Cookies
Cookies - Otis Spunkmeyer - Chocolate Chip
Cracker Snacks - Tom's - Oven Roasted Peanut Butter Sandwiches
Crackers - Cheez-It - Reduced Fat
Crackers - Nabisco - Ritz Air Crisps
Fries - Mclan Peppered
Fruit Bar - Nabisco - Fig Newton Fig Bar
Fruit Roll - Blaz'n Blue Fruit Roll-Ups
Fruit Snack - Harmony
Fruit Snacks - Acor - Strawberry
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Chewy Granola
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Chewy Vanilla Yogurt
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Fruit & Nut Trail Mix Bar
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Strawberry Yogurt
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Sweet & Salty Nut
Granola Bar - Nature Valley - Trail Mix Bar
Ice Cream - 3 Musketeers Bar
Ice Cream - Darigold - Neapolitan Sandwich
Ice Cream - M&M Brownie Sandwich
Ice Cream - M&M Ice Cream Cone
Ice Cream - M&M Sandwich
Ice Cream - Milky Way Bar
Ice Cream - Northstar-Strawberry Shortcake
Ice Cream - Snickers Bar
Ice Cream - Twix Bar
Instant Soup - Maruchan - Beef
Instant Soup - Maruchan - Shrimp
Nuts - Kars - Hot Spicy Peanuts
Nuts - Kars - Salted Cashews
Nuts - Planters Honey Roasted Peanuts
Popcorn - Act II - Butter
Sandwich - Smucker's Uncrustables - Peanut Butter & Jelly
Snack Mix - Chex - Bold Party Blend
Snack Mix - Munchies - Classic Mix
Snack Mix - Munchies - Flaming Hot
Snack Mix - Tom's - Mingles Premium
Soup - Campbells - Chicken Noodle
Trail Mix - Cup
Trail Mix - Mr. Nature - Energizer Mix
Trail Mix - Mr. Nature - Yogurt Trail Mix

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