



CHALLENGING THE SODA COMPANIES: **The Los Angeles Unified School District Soda Ban**

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On August 27, 2002, the Los Angeles Unified School District Board unanimously voted to ban soft drinks in all LAUSD schools, beginning January 2004. The soda resolution came about as a result of a number of factors, including community, teacher, and parent input, an organizing campaign launched by a coalition of healthy food and community food advocates, strong advocacy by LAUSD board members, LAUSD staff support, and the growing public recognition that the constant availability and consumption of high sugar and highly caffeinated soft drinks can contribute to significant adverse health and learning impacts. This report provides a summary of the events that preceded and led to the passage of the LAUSD soda resolution and its implications for future action.

Junk Food and Sodas: The Nature of the Problem

In light of burgeoning rates of childhood obesity and type II diabetes (a traditionally adult onset disorder), poor school nutrition environments have become a growing public health concern. While most meals offered as part of the federal school lunch and breakfast programs are healthier than the fare available outside of the school cafeteria, these school food programs compete against the widely available and aggressively advertised fast food, soft drink, and snack foods that fill vending machines, school stores, and a la carte cafeteria lines. Many schools are taking an “if you can’t beat them, join them” approach as evidenced by the explosion of junk food and widespread sale of sodas on campuses and at school-related events. And many of the same schools that offer health and nutrition education in the classroom are undercutting their own lessons by filling their hallways with chip and soda-dispensing vending machines.

Soft drinks constitute a significant part of the problem of poor child nutrition, representing hundreds of empty calories that can contribute to several important health risks. A standard 12-ounce can of soda contains about 160 Calories and 1.5 ounces of sugar.¹ Many vending machines offer 20-ounce bottles that contain 250 calories and 2.3 oz sugar. According to government data, the average 12- to 19-year-old soda-consuming male drinks more than two cans per day (868 cans annually), while the average female consumes 1¾ cans a day. For soda-consuming youth, such beverages provide from 9-18% of their total caloric intake and can displace more-nutritious foods and beverages from their diets.² Teenagers drink twice as much soda pop as milk, a nearly inverse relationship from the consumption patterns of 20 years ago³. For each additional soda consumed per day, the risk of obesity and related health conditions

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¹ J.A.T. Pennington, *Bowes and Church's Food Values of Portions Commonly Used*, 16th ed. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co, 1994)

² Jacobson MF. *Liquid Candy: How Soft Drinks are Harming America's Health*. Washington, DC: Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1998.

³ USDA: NFCS, CSFII

increases by 160%.⁴ In addition, soda consumption among children contributes to poor bone health. Because most girls have inadequate calcium intakes, they are more likely to suffer from osteoporosis (brittle bones) as they age and have an increased risk for broken bones while they are still young. Those who drink soft drinks have 3- to 4-times higher risk of bone fracture than those who do not.⁵ Soda consumption among youth is a concern to many health professionals because it may displace milk (a source of calcium) from the diet. In addition, soft drinks represent the largest single source of caffeine in children's diets (45-100 mg per can)⁶, and the sugar and acid in sodas contributes to tooth decay.⁷

Soda companies like Pepsi and Coca-Cola have adopted marketing strategies to establish brand loyalty as early in a consumer's life as possible, explicitly targeting school-aged children. Schools offer these companies an ideal venue for targeting young people with their branding activities. A Coca-Cola official stated that his company would "continue to be very aggressive and proactive in getting our share of the school business."⁸ These food companies spend billions of dollars on advertising, and have started offering large payments for exclusive marketing rights in schools and other locations where youth are present. These pouring rights contracts involve lump sum payments to school districts and additional payments over 5-10 years in return for exclusive sales of the company's products in vending machines and at all school events. The contracts often allow constant advertising through display of logos on machines, cups, sportswear, brochures, and school buildings. In this way, students receive constant exposure to the logos and products, an attempt by companies to create loyalty. Pouring-rights contracts result in students drinking more soda, vending machines in schools that previously did not have them, and vending machines in schools with younger children.⁹

Background to the Resolution: The Importance of LAUSD

With child obesity and diet related illnesses becoming a national priority, policy makers and health advocates have begun to challenge the explosion of unhealthy food and beverages available to students in schools. Soda, the leading source of sugar intake among teens, has become an obvious initial target. Many states already follow USDA recommendations that vending machines be turned off from the start of the school day until after the last lunch period. Last year, bills to bar soda sales in schools were introduced in California,¹⁰ Nevada,¹¹ Virginia,¹²

⁴ Ludwig DS, Peterson KE, Gortmaker SL. Relation between consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks and childhood obesity: a prospective, observational analysis. *Lancet* 2001;357:505-508.

⁵ Wyshak G. Teenaged girl, carbonated beverage consumption, and bone fractures. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 2000;154:610-613.

⁶ Ellison RC, Singer MR, Moore LL, et al. Current caffeine intake of young children: amount and sources. *J Am Diet Assoc* 1995;95:802-804.

⁷ Erickson PR, Alevizos DL, Rindelaub DJ. Soft Drinks: Hard on Teeth. *Clinical Feature. NW Dentistry* 2001 March-April:15-19.

⁸ Nestle, M. *Food Politics, How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2002)

⁹ Nestle, M. *Food Politics, How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2002)

¹⁰ Senate Bill 1520, originally written to tax sodas, was amended on April 29, 2002 to ban sale of sodas in schools. This version was voted down in committee on May 21, 2002": http://info.sen.ca.gov/pub/bill/sen/sb_1501-1550/sb_1520_bill_20020429_amended_sen.html

¹¹ Lisa Kim Bach, "Move to Restrict Junk Food in Schools Greeted Warily," *Las Vegas Review Journal*, December 18, 2000.

Kentucky,¹³ and Utah.¹⁴ These initial attempts fell short. A number of smaller school districts have taken the step of reducing student access to sodas and other unhealthy beverages. California's Folsom Cordova Unified School District (near Sacramento) has eliminated sodas and unhealthy junk food from its cafeterias.¹⁵ The Uinta County (Wyoming) school district has eliminated all soda vending.¹⁶ Capistrano Unified and Newport-Mesa Unified districts in Orange County, CA have started phasing out sodas and unhealthy snacks from school grounds.¹⁷ And most significantly, last year, California's Oakland Unified School District adopted a policy that "vending machines accessible to students shall not dispense sodas, drinks that contain caffeine or a high concentration of sugar ... during school hours."¹⁸ Clearly, these policies and bills represent the cusp of a trend. A decision by the giant Los Angeles Unified School District to eliminate sale of sodas from all sites accessible by students by requiring that only healthy beverages (water, milk, and some juices and sports drinks) be sold, would signal that the trend was becoming a national movement.

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the nation's second largest school district, with a K-12 enrollment of 736,675 in the 2001-2002 school year. The District's student body is diverse, but majority Latino. The ethnic breakdown is 69.9 percent Latino, 13.2 percent African American, 10.2 percent White, 4.2 percent Asian, 1.9 percent Filipino, .4 percent Pacific Islander, and .3 percent American Indian.¹⁹ A majority of students are from low-income families; 75.5 percent of LAUSD students qualified for free or reduced price federal meals in 2000-2001.²⁰

LAUSD serves around 670,000 meals a day to students, participants in after school programs, adult school students, and staff.²¹ The District spends between \$90-95 million dollars each year on food and supplies for its food services program, supplemented by an additional \$10-12 million in government donated bulk commodities.²² The meals prepared for federal breakfast and lunch programs are required to meet basic USDA nutritional standards, so for the most part school meals are healthier than food available in stores and restaurants in the low-income communities where many students live. The promise of school meal programs is undercut by the reputation (and reality) that school food is often prepared and presented in unappetizing ways. Participation rates in breakfast and lunch programs in LAUSD are low, especially in high schools, where they can drop below 10 or even five percent. And not all meals served are healthy. The District has incorporated fast food brand pizzas and subs as part of the national

¹² TinyTalksVending.com "Virginia Senate Committee Shelves School Vending Legislation for Year," March 28, 2002.

¹³ Crystal Harden, "School Food May Go on Diet," The Kentucky Post, March 12, 2002; TinyTalksVending.com "Kentucky Legislature Ends Regular Session With Two Victories for Vending Industry," April 19, 2002.

¹⁴ National Automatic Merchandising Association, "Utah Legislative Committee Drops School Vending Proposal," NAMA Western Update, April 19, 2002.

¹⁵ Chris Woolston, "School Lunches: Invasion of the Body Fatteners," Consumer Health Interactive, July 24, 2002.

¹⁶ Holly Strother, "Officials Claim Evanston Pop Ban Successful," Casper Star-Tribune, May 2002.

¹⁷ Claire Luna, "Schools Tell Soda Drinkers to Make Another Selection," Los Angeles Times, September 7, 2002.

¹⁸ Oakland Unified School District Nutrition Policy, December 12, 2001.

¹⁹ LAUSD Office of Communications, "Fingertip Facts 2001-2002."

²⁰ California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit, <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us>

²¹ Center for Food and Justice, Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, School Food Facts, 2001

²² "How School Food Service is Performing," Food Service Director, June 15, 2001, p. 51-52.

school lunch program. In 2000-2001, LAUSD spent nearly as much on these branded food items as it did on all the fruits and vegetables it procured (\$4.8 million vs. \$5.1 million).²³

School meal programs (and health education) are also undercut by the widespread availability of junk food and unhealthy beverages on campuses. The federal government bans public schools from making available in food service areas during meal times “Foods of Minimum Nutritional Value,”--that is, foods that provide less than 5% per serving of the US Recommended Daily Allowances for eight specified nutrients such as carbonated beverages, water ices, chewing gum, and most hard candies.²⁴ Regulation of competitive foods in other contexts (soda or chips in vending machines in school hallways, sales from school stores, fatty foods for sale in cafeteria a la carte lines, etc.) is left to the states and school districts. While LAUSD has policies on junk food dating from the 1980s, they are not universally enforced.²⁵ In practice, there are no vending machines in elementary schools, but there are soda vending machines in middle and high schools and continuation schools (K-8 and K-12). Unlike some school districts, LAUSD does not have a district-wide, long term, exclusive soda-vending contract with one of the large soda companies. Vending machines in schools are operated by one of two vending companies, with the District’s share of the sales going to a range of student and athletic programs.²⁶ Proceeds from the vending machines are fairly insignificant considering the scale of the District (just a few dollars per student per year). In fact, the District’s new Business Director estimated that increasing participation rates in meal programs could make up any lost proceeds from soda sales.²⁷

The Healthy School Food Committee and School Food Issues at LAUSD

In the spring of 1999, the UCLA School of Public Health conducted a study of diet and body mass index of children in low-income schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The researchers found that nearly half of the students at such schools were obese or overweight and the problem was particularly acute for African-American and Latino children.²⁸

Many of the schools that participated in the study asked the researchers what solutions they could offer to help reduce obesity and the diet related diseases their students were facing. UCLA partnered with the Center for Food and Justice based at Occidental College to introduce a “farm to school” or a “farmers’ market salad bar” as one intervention to improve student nutrition. The farm to school and salad bar programs, first introduced in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District in 1997, have since become a major success story around the country, indicating

²³ LAUSD “’01 Inventory Disbursements For Food Items, July 2000-June 2001”; Interview with Fred Carter, Purchasing Services Coordinator, Purchasing Branch, LAUSD.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture. Competitive food service (7 CFR, 210.2 and 210.12; 220.2 and 220.12). Federal Register. January 1, 1986

²⁵ LAUSD, “Sale of ‘Junk Food’ on School Campuses,” Bulletin No. C-49, January 29, 2001.

²⁶ Cara Mia DiMassa and Erika Hayasaki, “L.A. Schools Set to Can Soda Sales,” Los Angeles Times, Aug 25, 2002.

²⁷ Testimony by Michael Eugene, LAUSD Business Director, at LAUSD School Board Health and Safety Committee Hearing, August 15, 2002.

²⁸ Wendy Slusser, MD, MS, Principal Investigator, Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Salad Bar Program in the Los Angeles School District, School of Public Health, University of California, Los Angeles, June 24, 2001.

that when offered the choice, students will significantly opt for fresh, tasty, healthy food alternatives.²⁹

In 2000, CFJ staff began to meet with several LAUSD board members and their staff to facilitate their understanding of the farm to school and salad bar programs and to obtain their support for the development of a healthy school food program in LAUSD. CFJ staff co-authored three LA Times op-ed pieces about the connections between food access and healthy students that helped make more visible the potential for a healthy food approach. CFJ staff also began to meet with parents, teachers and other community members concerned about school food issues in LAUSD to help facilitate a process of parent and community involvement in bringing about change in these areas.

Partly in response to these various initiatives, LAUSD school board member Valerie Fields introduced a motion calling for an analysis of the quality of the food served in LAUSD schools and to develop an overall Healthy School Food Policy. Following the introduction of the motion but prior to a board vote on it, the informal network of parent and community activists decided to establish a new organization, called the Healthy School Food Committee (later called the Healthy School Food Coalition or HSFC). The HSFC began to identify a preliminary list of needed changes in school food policy and how any implementation process, stemming from the Valerie Fields motion, might work. The goal was to advocate for a strong district policy on food and nutrition that could meet some or all of the needed changes identified, one of which concerned the increased presence of junk food, including sodas, at school sites. The HSFC further decided to mobilize parents to be an organized presence at the Board meeting that would vote on Ms. Fields' motion.

On May 22nd, 2001 the Board passed a revised motion that instructed the Superintendent to investigate the food served in LAUSD schools and to develop a Healthy School Food Policy. The motion remained rather vague as to goals and outcomes, leaving it to the Superintendent to decide, based on the process established, what kind of policy was needed. Three weeks later, the Superintendent informed board members that a Child Nutrition Advisory Group would be formed to advise the Superintendent and that a technical consultant would also be hired to provide an analysis of the nutritional content, location, and times of the food served and available at LAUSD campuses. HSFC members immediately began to lobby their respective board members in an attempt to expand community participation in the CNAC body and to make its meetings open to the public. Toward this end, the CFJ organized a meeting of 25 organizations and individuals working to improve nutrition in the region. HSFC members also attended this meeting and explained the importance of parent and student participation on the CNAC and, more broadly, in shaping school food policy. A letter was subsequently sent to the Superintendent that included nearly all those present at the network meeting about opening the CNAC process. When the CNAC was established later that fall, teachers were included as participants and it was also agreed that student participants would receive transportation to and from CNAC meetings.

²⁹ The Farmers' Market Salad Bar: Assessing the First Three Years of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Program, Community Food Security Project, UEPI, October 2000.

During the next several months, the HSFC, supported by CFJ staff organizers, went through an intensive process of organizing and mobilization through individual visits, workshops, and trainings. As a consequence, the HSFC grew from an informal network led by a handful of individuals into an organized presence of parents focused on a range of school food issues, including but not limited to the development and implementation of a LAUSD school food policy.

One of the concerns about school food policy had to do with what were known as “competitive foods,” that is, foods sold outside the cafeteria on LAUSD campuses. This concern was reinforced by a July 2002 draft report by the technical consultant to the CNAC that included a focus on items sold in vending machines and through a la carte sales that had a high sugar, high caffeine, and high salt content. The consultant’s report included the recommendation that such foods no longer be made available to students.³⁰ The issue of vended items, including soda, resonated for members of the HSFC who had participated in the coalition of food and nutrition advocates that had formed in support of Senate Bill 1520 (Soda Tax Bill). Although SB 1520 was not successful, the HSFC had decided to turn its attention to the issue of junk food (calorically dense, low nutritional value) available on school campuses. Similar to the farm to school approach, the advocacy around junk food and sodas combined criticism of what was available to students with the need for healthy food alternatives.

SB 19 and the LEAF Grants: Getting Junk Food out of the Schools

The Healthy School Food Coalition’s campaign for healthier beverages built upon successful state level advocacy to reduce the availability of unhealthy food and beverages in schools. In 1999, the California Center for Public Health Advocacy brought together a number of experts and advocates on school food nutrition to formulate recommendations for limits on competitive foods. In late 2000 these healthy food advocates teamed up with State Senator Martha Escutia to sponsor SB 19, a bill to regulate the sale of unhealthy food and beverage items in all public schools (by setting standards for portion size, fat and sugar content, etc), increase state reimbursements to school districts for meals, and provide grants for nutrition and physical exercise programs.³¹ After being amended to apply mainly to elementary schools, SB 19 was passed and signed by the Governor in late 2001, thanks to a committed push from its sponsors and advocacy by nutrition and community food security groups throughout the state. Its regulations will come into force in January 2004 provided that funds are appropriated by that date.

Though the Bill was modified to not regulate food sold in high schools, it contained a pilot program to provide LEAF (Linking Education, Action, and Food) grants to middle and high schools willing to adopt nutrition policies paralleling the Bill’s elementary school requirements.³² In 2002, LAUSD applied for and received \$750,000 in funding for three schools under this program, including Venice High School. Jacqueline Domac, a health teacher at Venice, became the point person for her school’s implementation of the LEAF grant. Her

³⁰ WestEd, “Nutritional Assessment of Foods Sold in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Schools, July 2002.

³¹ http://info.sen.ca.gov/pub/bill/sen/sb_0001-0050/sb_19_bill_20011014_chaptered.html

³² LEAF Policy and Pilot Grants Program: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nsd/nets/fundleaf02.pdf>

testimony before an LAUSD committee in June 2002 explaining how a phase out of soda was *already* working at Venice High influenced those LAUSD board members who had begun to focus on the soda issue and helped precipitate the next steps in what became the soda resolution campaign.

The LAUSD Soda Resolution

On June 11, 2002, two LAUSD board members, Genethia Hayes and Marlene Cantor, quietly introduced a preliminary motion to ban the sale of soft drinks at all school sites.

The day after the board resolution was introduced, parents and members of the Healthy School Food Coalition met with Hayes and her chief of staff to discuss ways of working together to improve student nutrition. Hayes then informed the HSFC about the soda resolution that she and Canter had introduced and the meeting turned into a strategy session about how best to win the support of the other school board members. Hayes then went on to say to the HSFC group, “You guys could help us. If you can get 20 people to appear on the day of vote, it could really make a difference.”

It became clear from this meeting that the HSFC and other healthy food advocates could play a major role in whether or not this motion passed. But the HSFC also felt that the group’s role needed to go beyond turning out 20 people on the day of the vote. The soda resolution was recognized as a significant organizing opportunity for the HSFC and other healthy food advocates to extend this initiative to include the group’s goal of working for broader systemic changes in LAUSD’s school food policy.

Two days later, the HSFC initiated a meeting with Canter and her staff to discuss the motion. The HSFC organizers also invited Matt Sharp from the California Food Policy Advocates to the meeting. Other invited individuals included Jacqueline Domac, Dr. Shirley Thorton, Los Angeles Project Lean Coordinator, and Maria Reza, Assistant Superintendent for the Los Angeles Unified School District. This meeting became key to shaping the organizing strategy around the soda resolution. It was agreed at the meeting that more research needed to be done in order to strengthen the language of the motion. Canter also seconded Hayes’ argument that, in order to succeed, community support was crucial and that the HSFC and other advocates could play an instrumental role in working with and convincing other board members.

Following the Canter meeting, the HSFC organizers and California Food Policy Advocates staff convened a meeting to formally establish a Soda Resolution Coalition and design an organizing strategy. There were five components to the organizing campaign: developing language for the resolution, board member visits, generating support letters, mobilizing parents and community members for turnout at board meetings and lining up speakers. It was also decided to postpone any attempt to contact the media until after the date set for the LAUSD Health and Safety Committee Board Hearing to address the soda ban. By that point organizing efforts would have kicked into high gear, the motion would be public knowledge, and the coalition would be able to develop a more visible campaign.

A key goal for the campaign was the need to influence board members. Aside from Hayes, Canter, and (likely) Korenstein, the four other board members were either non-committal, felt they needed more information, or as in the case of one board member, argued that lack of physical activity and the need for nutrition education were more important than soda concerns. Following a series of meetings with these board members, a letter writing, e-mail, and phone campaign was launched. Parents, teachers, students, and other community members were mobilized and a number of anti-hunger, community food security, environmental, and community-based organizations were solicited to sign on to the campaign. HSFC members also organized a “Board Member Gift Delivery” the day before the August 15th Health and Safety Committee Hearing. Ten coalition members delivered each board member a full-sized mason jar of sugar representing the amount a teenager consumes in a week by drinking two sodas a day. This organizing action had an impact with several board members who said they were astounded by the quantity of sugar that was being consumed in just a one-week period. Canter, in fact, brought her jar of sugar to the Hearing and at the subsequent board meeting where the soda resolution was decided.

At the LAUSD Health and Safety Committee Hearing, with five board members in attendance, the “Healthy Beverages” or soda ban resolution was the main agenda item. More than 40 HSFC parents and other healthy food advocates were in attendance to hear board member Korenstein strongly endorse the resolution, and two other board members – Caprice Young and David Tokofsky – while not formally endorsing the resolution at the meeting, indicate strong concern about the issue and suggest that they agreed with the approach. The new LAUSD School Food Service Director and LAUSD’s Business Manager also provided support for the resolution.

In the two weeks following the August 15th hearing and prior to the full board vote at its regularly scheduled meeting on August 27th, the Soda Resolution campaign went into high gear and, in the process, became more publicly visible. A number of new organizations and activists were brought into the coalition’s work and the first media inquiries about the resolution began to occur. A Los Angeles Times reporter, meeting about other issues associated with the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, learned about the soda resolution and checked with her editor about coverage. Given the absence of any prior news coverage, the Times had not assigned any reporter to the story. After interviewing several activists involved in the campaign, the Times reporter recognized the national significance of the LAUSD soda resolution and convinced her editors to give it prominent display. The story ran on page one of the Sunday L.A. Times on August 24th, three days before the vote of the board.³³ The next day the Times ran an op-ed by board members Canter and Hayes.³⁴ As a result, there was an explosion of media interest in Southern California and around the country in the days up to and following the board vote.

At the August 27th board meeting, more than 100 activists assembled at the board offices, including the seven advocates and experts slated to speak on the resolution, and a number of students, parents, and community members who had become part of the organizing drive. A number of activists also had to be turned away since the board meeting room was full. County

³³ Cara Mia DiMassa and Erika Hayasaki, “L.A. Schools Set to Can Soda Sales,” Los Angeles Times, Aug 25, 2002.

³⁴ Marlene Canter and Genethia Hudley-Hayes, “L.A.’s Fat and Fizzy Campuses; Health should trump money: Curtail soda sales at public schools,” Los Angeles Times, August 26, 2002.

Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky spoke in favor of the resolution, and the Director of Public Health for Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, forwarded a support letter to Center for Food and Justice Director Maggie Masch, one of the seven slated to speak.³⁵

The board meeting was intense, and, as it turned out, filled with controversy. It was not clear at first whether there would be a board majority, let alone a consensus, in support of the resolution, despite the impact of the campaign and the potency of the issue. Several of the board members, while saying they agreed with the spirit of the resolution, raised issues around revenue loss and the date for implementation (the January 2004 date was chosen to allow schools who had contracts with companies like Pepsi or Coke to finish their contracts). Allusions were made to a threat by Coke to withdraw its \$20,000 donation for a LAUSD event. The board advocates for the resolution opposed any effort to link the soda ban to consideration of revenues, anticipating that the ban could subsequently be revoked if the need for funds by individual schools or the school district as a whole became part of the decision about the ban. Furthermore, the HSFC and coalition members had previously made it clear that it was critical to keep the resolution intact.

Much of the board debate centered on a series of amendments to the main resolution that sought to link the ban to the issue of fiscal impacts. Board members who advocated the ban were adamant about decoupling the two issues, insisting on the board's responsibility to deal directly and without qualification with such a significant health issue. Board member Canter also pointed out that on two earlier occasions LAUSD had decided to eliminate sodas from vending machines, only to allow the sodas back into the schools when revenues had declined.

Those board members who wanted to address fiscal impact issues as part of the resolution sought to set aside funds to insure that schools not suffer fiscally from the ban on sodas (even though the fiscal impacts could not be evaluated until the program was put into place). LAUSD Superintendent Roy Romer commented that each perspective (the need for a ban; how to address fiscal impacts) was important but needed to be separated. Romer, who was aware of both the intense organizing that had occurred and the enormous media interest, was able to bring the two sides together by suggesting that the original motion – a ban in January 2004 – be passed as proposed. He added that since he was required to file a semi-annual report on the ban, he would identify in his first report a plan on how the implementation would occur, including the issue of fiscal impacts. Romer also urged board members to understand how important it was to achieve consensus, and to present a unified perspective on the soda ban. After three hours of contentious debate, the original motion, with Romer's clarifying language, was finally voted on—and passed unanimously. After the role was called, attending supporters of the soda ban, many of them Latino and African-American parents and community members that had become active on the issue through the organizing campaign, burst into applause, hugged each other, and vowed to continue – and extend – their efforts.

³⁵ Letter from Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, August 26, 2002.

Next Steps

The passage of the LAUSD soda ban immediately became big news, due in part to its national significance. Several newspapers in southern California and throughout the state ran page one stories the day following the vote on the ban and nearly all local radio and television stations provided coverage. The wires picked up on the story and there was substantial national coverage as well. Inquiries were made by healthy food activists in other communities about developing similar resolutions in their school districts.

Soda ban organizers have now begun to discuss possible next steps. These include:

*** Insuring successful implementation of the soda ban.* Though strong efforts were made to reach out to parents and community members, outreach to students and teachers was more limited. However, where outreach occurred there were strong, positive responses. Organizers with the HSFC, for example, made two presentations to students at Bravo Medical Magnet and Roosevelt High School at the beginning of July (prior to the vote). During these presentations, the organizers talked candidly with high school students about commercialization, food politics, access to healthy food, industrial agriculture, and junk food. To drive home the point about commercialization and the soda industry, the organizers measured out the amount of sugar the average teenage boy “drinks” during a week. This presentation struck a cord with some of the students. Several of the students who heard the presentation and participated in the discussion subsequently played an active role in the HSFC. One of the high school students from Bravo in fact spoke before the LAUSD School Board on the day of the vote describing how the sugar presentation got him to think critically about soda. However, he also emphasized that most of his peers did not give food a second thought. It became clear to HSFC organizers that efforts for student outreach would be a high priority. Student participation, and even, where possible, students assuming a lead role in the changeover of vending machine products, would be key. Similarly, reaching out to teachers, including identifying innovative approaches to nutrition education as well as funding alternatives, is also seen as a high priority.

*** Analyzing funding and revenue issues and alternatives.* Though soda ban organizers stressed the crucial importance of decoupling a soda ban from its fiscal implications, there is recognition that information and alternatives need to be identified to break the pernicious link between unhealthy products and supplemental funding for schools. There may well be significant misinformation as well as overstated financial benefits associated with this link. For example, in the Covina Valley Unified School District, the vending machines were not cost effective due to the high cost of the electricity they consumed. When the district eliminated its vending machines, the reduction in energy usage was substantial enough to provide for an energy reduction rebate from Southern California Edison.³⁶ When the Oakland School district instituted its ban on soda and candy, there were concerns that schools would be hard pressed to make up the \$600,000 in supplemental funding for sports and other school activities from vending machine sales, but estimates of revenue loss may well have been significantly overestimated according to an Oakland school board member. More thorough, systematic research needs to be developed, as well as targeted initiatives for alternative funding streams.

³⁶ Personal communication with Karl Major, Covina Unified School District Business Division, September 4, 2002.

*** Developing Innovative Nutrition Education Programs and “Learning by Doing” Strategies.* One of the complaints students often have about nutrition education is the disconnect (and sometimes hypocrisy) associated with a more abstract presentation of nutrition education and what actually takes place in the real world. Nutrition education needs to be made more compelling, a process that can happen when students participate, through action or activities, in the education itself. School gardens, for example, offer one opportunity in this direction, as well as direct encounters with farmers and the growing of food. A new program to be launched Spring 2003, “CSA in the Classroom,” provides one kind of opportunity. The "CSA in the Classroom" project, developed by Tierra Miguel Farm, the LAUSD Nutrition Network, and the Center for Food and Justice, will have Nutrition Network teachers throughout the school district receive a one-time per semester per classroom delivery of farm-fresh produce for use in nutrition education activities. The boxes of produce will be tailored for use by classes (edible raw, appealing to children) and will include information about the farm, the produce, and more sustainable ways to grow food. Students become directly familiar with the nature of the food produced, and then can eat a fresh and tasty product about which they have learned!

*** Changing the School Food Environment.* Soda sales in vending machines are just one of a series of school food problems that need to be addressed. Soda companies, like fast food companies such as Taco Bell, that have established contracts with schools, are primarily interested in *branding*; that is, gaining long term loyalty for their brand name. These types of branding contracts with fast food companies to service the school lunch program at particular school sites has become one of the most rapidly growing trends in school food programs, including at LAUSD. For example, forty plus high schools throughout LAUSD have been chosen as pilot schools to test the “Triple Header Program.” This program brings Domino’s Pizza, Pizza Hut, and Pizza Loco (local pizza place) into schools as part of the National School Lunch Program. In these pilot schools students may use their lunch ticket to buy branded pizza. These programs in turn have contracts with clauses that enable the pizza companies to advertise within the schools. Even prior to the soda ban resolution, the Triple Header Program had become an organizing target for the HSFC. Similarly, the junk food sold in vending machines, aside from soda, represent a potential target for healthy school food activists. Beyond the issue of vended items, the school lunch and breakfast programs themselves need to be changed in ways that highlight fresh and tasty healthy foods as well as overcome the biases that pin the label of “county food” or welfare-oriented food that has come to be associated with school meals.

*** Developing a National Soda Ban Campaign.* The organizing lessons from the LAUSD soda ban and related media coverage indicate that the timing might be right to quickly and dramatically extend a soda ban to school districts throughout the country. The importance of such action, though narrow and focused in its intent, should not be underestimated as to its importance. The soda companies’ enormous interest in the K-12 market, similar to tobacco company efforts to appeal to a youth market, not only reflects a desire to increase immediate sales, but also recognizes the income potential associated with long-term addictions. Nevertheless, there are also indications that soda sales may be declining in the U.S., at least as a percentage of the revenue stream for companies like Coke and Pepsi in relation to their non-soda products like flavored waters and juices. Soda, like fast food in general, is becoming more vulnerable to targeted campaigns.

Lessons Learned

The LAUSD soda campaign illustrates, among other lessons, that organizing needs to be part of any campaign that includes policy development, research, and educational initiatives. In conversation with the HSFC's Lead Organizer, one board member's Chief of Staff commented that the organizing had been "very impressive." He asked if the Healthy School Food Coalition and its coalition partners would continue their efforts after the board action. "Count on it, we'll be around for a long time to come," the organizer responded.

The enormous media response, while welcome in highlighting an issue and helping establish a groundswell that could lead to action, may also lead to misinformation and a framing of the issue that clouds key goals and objectives. What becomes important about a highly visible, public campaign, is the ability of organizers to both frame the terms of the debate and link effective research and policy proposals to organizing tactics, such as the use of the mason jar filled with sugar identifying an average week's consumption of soda.

Healthy food advocates, nutritionists, community food security organizers, anti-hunger and social justice activists all have a stake in challenging the soda companies, junk food promoters, and fast food industry. Another lesson of the soda ban campaign is that access to fresh and healthy food needs to become more than a marginal choice limited to niche markets but the option of choice for all communities and in all institutional settings. Schools are a good place to start.



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