



F O C U S O N ISSUES *Critical*

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Downsizing the student body

Overcrowding in schools takes on new meaning these days. Nine million overweight school-children across the nation are swelling the ranks in our classrooms, clogging the lunch lines and stuffing the halls.

Kids are about 9 pounds heavier today than in the early 60s, and teens' weight has increased 12-16 pounds over 40 years, according to recent government statistics. Some 15 percent of Oregon's kids are "at risk of being overweight" and 8 percent are "overweight," according to the state's epidemiologist. That means that 23 percent of our kids are getting fat or fatter.

Boards and districts around the state are working with staff, business and community partners – and the new Legislature – to counteract the obesity epidemic.

*This issue of **Focus on Critical Issues** explores how some boards are "downsizing" their student bodies without a huge price tag.*

How are schools overcoming barriers? What works best? Why even worry about obesity during a budget crisis? We explore these questions, the impact obesity has on learning and health, plus the latest in curriculum and board policies that will curb this crisis.

Oregon's response to childhood obesity

What happens when society decides to stop super-sizing its kids?

School leaders in Oregon may find out soon. Because of increasing concern about childhood obesity and the role schools play in the problem, several initiatives are under way that could dramatically affect how schools teach physical education and feed their students.

With already-strained budgets, those changes could drive up program costs and drive down food revenues. Think mandated physical activity and bans on junk food.

The potential impact on food programs is especially worrisome for educators. Sales of cafeteria food – some of it minimally regulated and high in fat, sugar and sodium – raised \$130 million for Oregon schools in 2002-03, the most recent year for which data are available. Sales of totally unregulated food, including non-nutritious junk through fund-raisers, vending machines and snack bars, could be bringing in millions more.

School boards should take the lead on this issue, if for no other reason than to ensure that the food served in their schools isn't hurting children.

The pressure is rising

More than one-fifth of Oregon's eighth- and 11th-graders are overweight, and less than a third eat enough nutritious food and get enough exercise. School meal programs struggle to meet federal nutrition guidelines,

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physical education programs offer less than half of the recommended amount of physical activity and every high school has vending machines selling junk food, according to a national study by the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

The pressure is building on school leaders to do something. For example:

- Oregon legislators are developing bills for the 2005 session that would mandate daily physical education in kindergarten through eighth grade, ban vending machines, require reporting of students' obesity status and apply tougher nutrition standards to food in cafeterias. A physical education bill would mandate up to 225 minutes a week in middle schools, with at least half in moderate to vigorous physical activity. That's roughly twice as much as what most schools provide.
- A task force is expected to recommend changes in nutrition policy to the State Board of Education by late January. Changes are expected to focus on *a la carte* food (individual items sold separately from heavily regulated full meals) and encourage more community involvement.
- Under a new federal law, school boards have until 2006 to establish wellness policies that include goals for nutrition education and physical activity, as well as nutrition guidelines for school food. The law requires boards to involve parents, students and the public in developing policies. See sample online policies in OSBA's Healthy Kids Learn Better section of the new Fighting Childhood Obesity resource page.
- National and local media are dialing up the pressure. One Oregon newspaper recently ran a series that called schools "obesity factories."

Should we blame schools?

Schools can't be blamed, since children spend about 75 percent of their waking hours each year away from school. Outside of the classroom, busy parents rely more on "con-

venience" foods and have allowed children to adopt sedentary lifestyles. Corporations have spent billions making and promoting junk food.

But schools – unlike in the private home – are one place we can at least control the food offered.

When mandates are accompanied by government money, schools are doing a pretty good job. For example, firm rules and financial support from the federal government have built strong school-meal programs. Meal programs provide full breakfasts and lunches, rather than individual food items. Research shows that students who buy these meals eat more nutritious food than those who don't, both in school and off campus. Since 1992, when Congress mandated significant changes, school meal programs have increased vitamins and other nutrients while cutting back on fats and salt.

Where mandates and money don't match, the results have been much different.

Take physical education. In Oregon, very few schools offer daily teacher-led physical activity, says Margaret Bates, an education specialist who works on physical education issues for the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). She and others note that Oregon requires schools to offer physical education but leaves it up to school districts to decide what form the program will take. In contrast, both state and federal law impose strict requirements for instruction in reading and mathematics, with potential penalties for schools that fall short in these areas.

As budgets have tightened, school leaders channeled funding to reading and math while cutting back in physical education, Bates says.

Then there's junk food. Its influence in school has been growing since 1983, when a federal court overturned a U.S. Department of Agriculture rule prohibiting the sale of food in competition with the school meals program. Federal rules now ban the sale of junk food during meal periods only in areas where meals are served. However, the rules don't apply to other areas of school, and they allow the sale anywhere

and any time of such snacks as candy bars and "fruitades."

The looser rules have combined with tighter budgets to make schools more amenable to non-nutritious food. Many districts eliminated local subsidies for their food programs and cut way back on funding for student activities such as sports and music. To cover shortfalls, food service directors increased sales of *a la carte* food, and activities directors have ramped up fund-raising efforts, including the sale of snacks.

Food companies have capitalized by selling heavily promoted items in cafeterias and negotiating contracts that provide exclusive distribution for certain brands in schools. Many of these products are sold in vending machines, in student stores, at concession stands and in house-to-house campaigns by students raising funds.

The most profitable of these foods tend to be the least nutritious. For example, three-fourths of the drinks and 85 percent of the snack foods served in vending machines are of poor nutritional value, according to the national Center for Science in the Public Interest.

In Oregon, much of the revenue from vending machines flows directly to individual schools and is never reported to districts, let alone to the state. This revenue isn't included in the \$130 million mentioned earlier. It's on top of it. And generally, schools can use it any way they see fit, not plow it back into the food service program.

In the absence of hard data, people who specialize in school food programs believe the revenue from such sales is substantial. Joyce Dougherty, ODE director of child nutrition, says that if people knew how much money schools were taking from junk food sales, "they'd be shocked."

What school leaders can do

Communities would likely support change in school food and exercise programs if it's handled right. A national study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation indicates that parents and teachers support converting school vending machines

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to sell nutritious foods and drinks. The same survey indicates support for daily physical education in every grade level.

Fortunately for school leaders who tackle the problem, there are plenty of resources to use.

OSBA offers guidance on improving nutrition in schools through the Healthy Kids Learn Better program; see online resources under Fighting Childhood Obesity section. The recommendations include:

- Make nutritious and appealing food available wherever food is offered at school.
- Price healthy food at no more than junk food.
- Give food service management control of all food sales in school, except for fund-raisers.
- Ban vending machines in elementary schools and turn off remaining machines until 30 minutes after the last mealtime.

- Ban incentives in contracts for student consumption of junk food.

OSBA also recommends that all schools make safe, good-tasting water available for free and encourage kids to drink it.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation also provides recommendations for PE programs:

- Provide 30 minutes of daily PE for every child in every grade.
- Adopt PE programs that stress lifelong fitness over team sports.
- Conduct fitness testing in schools.

The foundation also describes strategies to help make changes and provides examples of districts that made significant changes in their nutrition and fitness programs. (They are listed online in the Healthy Kids Learn Better site.)

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers guidelines to help school districts develop a health curriculum that includes nutrition education and uses the school-

food program to reinforce lessons about food. The CDC says districts should get the school community involved in developing nutrition policies that promote healthful food, discourage junk food, and guarantee adequate time for nutrition education and student meals.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers materials that teach children how to make healthful nutrition choices and help schools promote healthful nutrition environments. The materials are available through Team Nutrition (www.fns.usda.gov/tn/) and Changing the Scene (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/changing.html>).

Oregon's Department of Human Services has included schools in its new statewide plans for public health and nutrition. The plans call for state and local policies to limit high-sugar and high-fat foods in schools and to require daily physical education. The

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The high cost of childhood obesity

With schools focused on academic achievement and shrinking budgets, why worry about childhood obesity?

Obesity has a direct educational – and financial – impact on schools.

“Many studies have been done on the link between nutrition and learning,” says Dr. Victoria Warren-Mears, clinical coordinator for the dietetic internship program at Oregon Health and Science University. “Children who consume high levels of sugar and fat tend not to do as well academically.”

Poor performance and absenteeism cost money. Kids who do poorly in school tend to need more special services. And chronic absence can lead to lost revenue, because Oregon schools receive state funding based on weighted average daily membership (ADMw).

There are long-term costs as well. Obese children are at greater risk for

disease. Nationally, diagnoses of type 2 diabetes in children have increased tenfold in the past 20 years. Plus, they grow into adults with a higher risk for heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure.

Obesity-associated annual hospital costs for children more than tripled over two decades, rising from \$35 million in 1979-81 to \$127 million in 1997-99. National healthcare spending related to overweight adults alone ranges from \$98 to \$129 billion annually.

But isn't it expensive to improve nutrition in schools? Not necessarily.

“School food service programs can be self-supporting,” says Heidi Dupuis, child nutrition specialist at the Oregon Department of Education. “By fully utilizing the school breakfast program, schools can improve student nutrition and see a significant increase in federal reimbursement.”

Example: ODE worked with Nyssa School District to increase participation in its breakfast program. Moving breakfast to the classroom increased student participation to 80-90 percent. Breakfast reimbursement has jumped from \$68,000 in 2002 to \$197,000 in 2004 with little labor cost increase. Participation has increased from 370 breakfast meals per day in 2002 to almost 1,000 per day in 2004.

“Another way to improve the revenue stream is to make sure that *a la carte* items are not underpriced,” Dupuis says.

School officials dependent on

Replacing high fat/high sugar products with healthier choices in vending machines doesn't always mean a drop in sales.

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revenue from vending machines and snack bars may be afraid that sales will drop if they replace high fat/high sugar products with healthier choices. But there's ample evidence to the contrary.

Old Orchard Beach School District in Portland, Maine, worked with vendors to replace soft drinks with water and fruit juice and chips and cookies with cereal, trail mix, pretzels and fruit snacks. Revenue didn't drop.

Vista Unified School District in California bought its own vending machines and replaced high-fat/high-sugar snacks with healthier options such as yogurt and granola, fruit, and cheese and crackers and offered less soda and more water, juice and milk. In the first year the district generated \$200,000 more in annual sales.

Instead of selling candy to fund school activities, student groups can sell items ranging from gift wrap and candles to logo sweatshirts and caps. They can host dances and workshops or hold carwashes and talent shows.

Dupuis advises school officials to do some research before changing their food programs, however.

"You need to know how many students are taking part in your *a la carte* program, and how much you're making on vending machines and food sales," she says. "Then you can make adjustments to find the balance that works best for your school."

For information and assistance with school nutrition, contact Dupuis at (503) 378-3600, ext. 2623, or *heididupuis@state.or.us*.

The classroom connection: Addressing obesity through education

What are Oregon students learning about nutrition and exercise? The answer varies depending on the school and district.

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) requires Oregon school districts to have a K-12 health education plan that includes age-appropriate instruction about infectious disease, alcohol and drug-use prevention, and human sexuality. Districts currently use the National Health Education Standards to guide instruction, but that will change soon.

The State Board of Education is currently reviewing content standards and curriculum goals for health education. These standards and goals cover a number of subjects including healthy eating and physical activity. Once they're adopted, school districts will have two years to align their health education curricula with standards. But actual curriculum decisions will continue to be made at the local level.

"Curriculum is locally controlled," says ODE Health Education Curriculum Specialist Jess Bogli. "We want to be respectful of local communities, and support them in choosing the materials that are right for them."

Districts can select from a num-

ber of excellent health education curricula that give students a chance to practice making personal health decisions and teach them to look critically at messages they see in the media.

Examples of curricula used at ODE (for details, link from OSBA's Childhood Obesity Web section; look for "education programs"):

- ETR Associates' HealthSmart program includes age-appropriate instructional materials for all grades. Nutrition and physical activity are included.
 - Teenage Health Teaching Modules is a comprehensive health education curriculum for middle and high school students. The module Being Fit emphasizes that all people can achieve physical fitness, and provides strategies for adolescents to begin and maintain an exercise program.
 - The Michigan Model for Comprehensive School Health Education® is a K-12 health education curriculum that includes learning objectives, preparation instructions, lesson procedures and activities. Many lessons include ideas to incorporate health education into core curriculum areas.
 - The Great Body Shop is a comprehensive health and substance abuse prevention program available to preschool, elementary and middle school students. At the elementary level, resources include posters, charts, book and video lists, student newsletters, parent bulletins, Web sites and music.
 - Growing Healthy is a K-6 health education curriculum that uses skill-building activities and strategies to teach personal health habits, values and self-esteem. Materials include grade-specific curriculum guides, kits with videos, models, puppets and other materials.
- ODE offers free training on these curricula. For more information, contact Bogli at (503) 378-3600, ext. 4525.

Task force developing nutrition recommendations

In August 2004 the Oregon Department of Education convened the Food Choices in Schools (FCS) Task Force, a group of representatives from the school, business and health communities.

The group is gathering research and developing recommendations on board policy, curriculum, student nutrition, community involvement and funding of school activities through food sales.

"The report will be a great resource for boards in every area from policy to how to involve citizens," says Angie Peterman, school district services specialist who represents OSBA on the panel. "We hope to provide recommendations to the State Board in January."

For more information, contact Peterman at *apeterman@osba.org* or 800-578-6722.



Overcoming barriers: Grants Pass, Beaverton take it on

Once school leaders decide to fight childhood obesity, they'll need to overcome barriers of money, time and space.

That's exactly what's happening in Grants Pass and Beaverton.

The Grants Pass School District is changing the ways it teaches nutrition, provides food to students and deals with food vendors. The Beaverton School District is shifting its physical education program from a sports focus to a lifelong fitness focus.

Neither district has finished the job. These aren't success stories, yet. They're works in progress that show how real people are dealing with real challenges in the obesity battle.

Among the key lessons so far:

- Set aside money to plan change. Grants Pass tapped a cash reserve that had built up in its food service account, and Beaverton got a grant. Both districts are using the funds to pay staff to assist in planning. Beaverton also is using grant funds to buy fitness-oriented equipment.
- Avoid budget-busting change. Grants Pass is protecting revenue that schools get from vendors, even as it pushes them to increase nutritious offerings and cut down on junk food. Beaverton won't add physical education staff; rather, it will focus on changing what's taught and how.
- Allow time to make change. Grants Pass expects to take two years; Beaverton, three. Much of that time will be spent building staff support for change and teaching staff how to make it. Both districts also are taking time to get parents and other community members involved.
- Avoid schedule-busting change. A key challenge for Grants Pass

will be working nutrition education into an already crowded curriculum. Beaverton will look for time to test thousands of students to determine whether they meet up to 14 state "benchmarks" in PE.

- Avoid space-eating change. Grants Pass knows its cafeterias don't have enough space to serve all students. Beaverton students need up to 225 minutes a week of physical activity, but the district also knows it only has gym space to provide half that amount.

THE GRANTS PASS STORY

Robin Stromberg, the Grants Pass food service director, knew it was time for a change. For two years, teachers had told him they were worried about overweight kids and the food they were getting in school. Stromberg had studied other food service programs, including those at major universities. With school board support, he began to make changes:

- Pressuring vendors to supply more nutritious foods, including more vegetables in high school;
- Changing rules to let students get seconds on fruits and veggies. He got a Defense Department grant to buy more nutritious produce;
- Working with vendors to remove images of carbonated drinks from vending machines.

The school board implemented Team Nutrition, a Department of Agriculture program that involves schools, parents and community members in reducing obesity. Stromberg has assembled a committee that will study nutrition curriculum, food services, competitive foods (including those from vending machines and snack bars) and physical education. He pays teachers to serve on the committee and expects to invest

\$20,000 in the program this year from his food service account.

Stromberg hopes to have recommendations for the board by the end of this year. Among the issues the group will discuss are creative ways to make time available for physical activity, how to educate parents about proper nutrition, and whether to close campuses during lunch.

One of the thorniest issues will be sales from soft-drink companies. He says high schools in Southern Oregon are bringing in up to \$150,000 a year each, through signing bonuses and commissions from these vendors. Most of his sales are at sports events. And much of the revenue supports popular student activities.

"We can't afford to lose that revenue base for student groups," Stromberg says.

What can happen, he says, is to shift the revenue away from sales of non-nutritious snacks and toward sales of more healthful items such as water and 100 percent juice products.

Stromberg says school board support has been crucial.

"They'd rather see us as a leader instead of waiting for change to come down on us," he says.

THE BEAVERTON STORY

Kathy Herrick saw her district's physical education program shift in the wrong direction. The curriculum had a team-sports emphasis, says Herrick, an achievement specialist in physical education, health and counseling. Children who actually played team sports were a small minority, and only a few stayed with sports beyond high school.

Herrick also knew that national and state experts were recommending that PE focus on activities that maintain fitness long after leaving school.



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With school board backing, she got a \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to revamp PE. The grant allowed district staff to define new goals. It paid for training, parent education and equipment like pedometers and heart-rate monitors to implement the new program.

Now, students in all grades are doing step aerobics, juggling and kick boxing workouts. High school students have a choice of courses to fulfill their state graduation requirement in PE. Besides a course in team sports, they can take a movement course or a course in individual/dual activities. Health issues are included in all three courses.

Herrick's is an unusual district in Oregon – virtually every school, including elementary, has a PE teacher. But Beaverton is not unusual in facing limitations to its PE program.

Herrick says students are getting only about half the recommended time in physical activity: 150 minutes a week for elementary students and 225 a week for middle schoolers. She says the new PE program isn't likely to increase the amount of activity for students, but it will teach skills students can use into adulthood.

Beaverton is in its third year of re-vamping PE and is developing procedures for assessing student achievement. The district hopes to offer a special diploma for students who reach state standards in all subjects, including PE. To determine who's reached those standards, teachers must test students against a set of prescribed benchmarks. There are seven benchmarks for third-graders, increasing to 14 for high-schoolers.

Herrick says middle schools have divided their PE testing into thirds, with some benchmarks at sixth, seventh and eighth grades. She says even with the divided responsibility, schools are having trouble assessing all students. The problem is even more acute in high schools, which have a semester at most to assess students against all of their benchmarks.

Since Beaverton is the first district to face this dilemma, how it solves the problem will help other districts.

BEST PRACTICES:

Corvallis, Umatilla, Bend-LaPine, Lake Oswego, Eugene *Encourage healthy choices for a lifetime of good eating*

Even if students ate lunch at school every day, we'd only have a potential to impact about 20 percent of their meals," says Joanne Keesee, a registered dietitian and director of Food and Nutrition Services for Corvallis School District.

"Offering students healthy choices in an effort to encourage a lifetime of good eating habits is our primary concern. Education and parental guidance also have a large part to play in changing eating habits."

OSBA looked into a sampling of districts to learn how schools are fighting childhood obesity: Corvallis, Umatilla, Bend-LaPine, Lake Oswego and Eugene.

Two middle schools in Corvallis have eliminated candy, soda and donuts this year in an effort to promote healthier eating. Other efforts in Corvallis schools include:

- Salad bars featuring 18 or more items, including fresh fruits and vegetables. One of these salads is a meal in itself.
- Baked, not fried, is the rule.
- Pizzas now use low-fat mozzarella cheese and school-made wheat crust; luncheon meats and wieners are made from low-fat turkey.
- Entrees like spaghetti and chili now are made with bulgar instead of beef.
- Salt shakers are no longer set out on the tables.
- Asian-style 'bento' meals, with rice and savory sauces.
- Yogurt, fruit, jerky, bagels, granola bars, and veggie and fruit trays are snack bar offerings.

"In Umatilla, taco, chef and chicken salads are prepared for middle and high school students," says Guy Jager, the district's child nutrition director. "Sales have gone from about 12 salads a day to 35 or so" as the district promotes healthy eating.

Put your customers first

We all hope that students in our schools will pick the healthy snacks over sweets and chips, but is there any way we can help ensure they do?

"Schools need to communicate with their 'customers' – the kids – or they will definitely object to changes," says Heidi Dupuis, child nutrition specialist for the Oregon Dept. of Education. "We have to do some work up front, such as letting kids sample new products and pick the ones that they like. Districts that let kids help pick their options have more success."

A successful "offering table" each month in Bend-LaPine elementary schools encourages students to try new food items.

"We offer different foods, like hummus and marinated tofu, to see how the kids like them," says Katrina Wiest, district wellness specialist. "One time we got a call from someone at the local Safeway who said, 'What are you doing at school? We're all out of hummus!'"

Keep your eyes on the size

Many kids today think supersized portions are normal. Smaller portions are the key to a healthier lifestyle.

For example, large muffins were popular with high school students in Lake Oswego, but they were packed with up to 600 calories. Sharon Morgan, the district's food services supervisor, hasn't eliminated this big seller; she just offers smaller muffins now, with fewer calories. Morgan also replaced the large 'Grab bag' size of chips with a smaller size for students who can't kick their chip habit.

"When kids complain about the portion size of their lunches, we tell them they can fill up on fruits and vegetables," says Guy Jager of Uma-



tilla. He has seen the consumption of fresh vegetables increase 100 percent in the eight years he's been with the district.

Change the culture, not just the menu

Obesity and poor eating habits aren't just a food service issue. "We need to see it as a school cultural issue," says Dupuis.

From concession stands at high school games, to cookies for good behavior, school culture often revolves around unhealthy rewards. Is there a way to acknowledge students or help schools raise money that doesn't involve chocolate?

"Even in schools that have high standards in lunch, there are vending machines that have no standards," Dupuis says. "Some of those machines are in the teachers' lounge. We're modeling bad behavior."

Food is merely another aspect of child welfare, Dupuis says. "We say no to drugs

in school, we've limited the use of tobacco and now we need to limit the kinds of foods we're offering to kids."

It's no surprise that profit margins are greater on pop than on fruit juice. It might just require a negotiated amendment to change a district's

contract with a company to include more fruit juice drinks, Dupuis says.

Teach them to eat right

Children's eating patterns are ingrained by the third grade, research shows. Changing those patterns after that age is difficult. Nutrition education, beginning in elementary school, is the key to success.

"This year we brought in Tom Ohling, the Nutrition Magician, to our elementary schools," says Jager, of Umatilla. He focuses on magic, food, family and fun in his sessions with the kids. (Check out Ohling on the Web at www.nutritionmagician.com.)

Elementary students in Eugene learn how to "Build a Burrito" from Nicole Lalor, the district's registered dietician. Kids learn to make a healthy snack.

"We feature a different fruit or vegetable each month on our menu," Lalor says, "and we have a '5-A Day' program where kids learn how to make healthy food choices from a mini-refrigerator I take to classrooms." At an A-Z salad bar, Eugene elementary students can try everything from apples to zucchini.

A star-man logo (similar to the heart-healthy logo) identifies healthy food choices in the Eugene district's elementary cafeterias. Secondary students can select "Performance Zone" foods in their cafeterias. Calories and fat content are listed for all foods in the Performance Zone.

Teaching children to eat right offers benefits beyond physical fitness, according to research. Healthy children are better learners, and they have better behavior.

Rewrite the recipes

In Eugene, favorite recipes have a new twist. For example, on grilled cheese sandwiches, instead of spreading margarine on the bread to grill it, pan spray is used.

"Kids like white bread, but we use one slice of white and one of wheat when we make sandwiches," Lalor says. "We also offer a super-donut fortified with vitamins and minerals."

"In Umatilla we have two of the best deep fryers money can buy," Jager says. "As soon as we're out of oil, we're going to stop serving deep-fryer French fries." Potato products will all be baked, he says.

Food vs. finances: Finding the right balance

No one can force healthy food down a student's throat. Some districts are finding that food sales go down when healthy changes are made. Kids brown-bag their sugary donuts and candy bars, or go off campus to buy them. (In Los Angeles, when schools banned soda pop from vending machines, enterprising students were discovered selling pop from cases stashed in their lockers.)

One way Sodexo, the Eugene district's food management company, encouraged participation in the nutritious hot lunch program was to raise the cost of a *la carte* items.

Kids could buy pizza, chips and a soda for two bucks – less than the \$2.25 for a hot lunch. Increasing the cost of a *la carte* items led to more students opting for the hot lunch.

Corvallis, like other districts, has a financial incentive to encourage kids to eat school meals, according to

Joanne Keese, the district's director of Food and Nutrition Services. Revenues must cover expenses for the school meal program to continue.

While communities with high levels of low income students may receive \$2.24 a meal in federal reimbursement, Corvallis receives only 21 cents in federal reimbursement for the majority of its meals. Balancing the food service budget is a tough task, making it even more important that students "buy" into the healthier food choices the district now provides, Keese says.

The Corvallis district anticipated food sales would go down when some popular – and non-nutritious – foods were eliminated. Sure enough sales are down. "While making money shouldn't be our main focus," Keese says, "it would be nice if the health and teaching of lifelong eating habits to children could be."

According to no-junkfood.org, school kids can sell other things to raise money – without fat and sugar. Check out the Web site for ideas ranging from gift wrap and greeting card sales to jump-rope-a-thons.



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Vending: *Don't kill the messenger*

Vending machines have been in Oregon schools for decades. In the 1970s and '80s, the entire food service program at Marshfield Senior High School in Coos Bay was run through vending machines.

"We leased the machines to the school," says Lou Leberti, owner of Vend West, a Coos Bay vending company. "School cooks made the food and loaded the machines."

But that kind of arrangement is rare. Many of Oregon's secondary schools have contracts with Coca-Cola or Pepsi-Cola that give the companies exclusive "pouring rights" in exchange for a steady stream of funding to help pay for school athletics, music programs, or other activities.

"Some people want to ban vending machines altogether," Leberti says. "They think it will solve the childhood obesity problem. But vending machines are just a delivery system. They can be used to sell healthy items like nuts, granola bars, yogurt and juice."

Customer demand for healthier products is encouraging mainstream suppliers to expand their offerings, Leberti says. "I think there's a definite place for vending in schools. Our products help kids stay hydrated and give them energy to get through the day. We are happy to work with parents and school officials to pro-

vide the products they want for their students."

Leberti is on the board of directors of the Northwest Automatic Merchandising Association. He is also a member of the Food Choices in Schools Task Force, a group working on recommendations for dealing with student nutrition, childhood obesity and school activity funding.

Federal regulations require schools to limit access to "foods of minimal nutritional value," defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food & Nutrition Service as soda, water ices, chewing gum and certain candies. These items may not be sold in the same place and at the same time that the school offers its regular food service program.

Each district or school makes its own decisions on vending machine sales. Agreements may include placing timers on machines to allow operation during certain hours; stocking items that meet guidelines for fat and sugar content; and offering healthy items at reduced prices.

Salem-based Kettle Foods, a maker of gourmet snacks, recently joined Stonyfield Farm's Healthy Vending Machine Program. The program sells low-fat, organic, and natural snack foods to schoolchildren in California, Massachusetts, Illinois, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

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plans also encourage forming health advisory councils in every school and providing training in nutrition and exercise for school staff.

It can – and should – be done

Most of those who have weighed in on this issue say solutions can be found if school leaders will make a commitment to change, involve interested parties in devising changes, and provide resources to implement them.

For example, the Redmond School Board recently banned the sale of high-sugar items on school grounds during the school day. The board had formed a Wellness and Nutrition Education Committee a few months ago. The ban was "phase one" of an overall effort to improve wellness. The Salem-Keizer Board, thanks to prompting by the local Stand for Children chapter, will stop offering the sugary Tampico drinks in schools. For a deeper look into what other districts are doing, see story page 6.

Schools can make changes without cutting revenues or busting budgets. Experts contend that acting to reduce obesity gives schools a chance to do something that will help the whole community.

As Joyce Dougherty, the Education Department's nutrition director, puts it, "Obesity is not just a school problem. But while kids are in school, let that environment be a healthy environment."

More online: www.osba.org

Read more in new online section from homepage: *Fighting Childhood Obesity*

- Learn about partnerships with experts: OHSU, doctors and hospitals in Salem, Eugene, Bend
- Eugene's federal PEP grant improves fitness
- More about the state's Food Choices in Schools Task Force
- OSBA's *Healthy Kids Learn Better* resources
- OSBA's sample student wellness policies
- Plus links to dozens of reports, sites and resources



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