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Addicted Schools: Dependence on Soda Money is a Shame

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Editorial

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The Assembly may vote Monday on SB 677, a bill by state Sen. Deborah Ortiz, D-Sacramento, that would ban the sale of soft drinks such as Coke and 7-Up from elementary school campuses statewide. The bill originally targeted middle and high schools as well, but was amended by the Assembly Health Committee to exempt them. Already approved by the state Senate, SB 677 does not preclude vending machine sales of water, milk, juice, or sports drinks.

But even the scaled-down version of the bill is struggling to get the Assembly votes needed for passage. Strong opposition is coming from bottlers and vending suppliers.

And other opposition, from unexpected groups such as the California State Conference of the NAACP, the Black American Political Association of California, the California Black Chamber of Commerce, the California State Grange and TELACU (The East Los Angeles Community Union), has bogged the bill down.

Their opposition shares a theme: The schools, especially in less affluent neighborhoods, need the money from soda sales to help fund sports teams, bands and so on.

Even the California School Food Service Association (the outfit that you'd think would care most about what the kids eat at school) is opposed. CSFSA frets over the loss of soda-generated funds to support school lunch programs.

The opposition from these groups underlines just how far California schools have fallen in their public resources, and how desperate those in poor areas are to fund what used to be considered basic programs.

The schools' funding plight is real and getting worse, no argument. But what an ugly cycle of addiction they're in: They're so hard up they've become dependent upon selling products that are demonstrably bad for children to children who can scarcely afford to buy them.

There must be better solutions, including healthier private partnerships. The Assembly should have the courage to break the cycle of addiction and pass SB 677.