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**Ontario Says More Than Just Soft Drinks Have to be Banned
from Schools**

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TORONTO (CP) - Ontario is applauding a move by the Canadian soft-drink industry to voluntarily withdraw soda from elementary schools, but says that's only the first step towards banning all junk food from schools.

"It's a good development," Ontario Education Minister Gerard Kennedy said Tuesday. "I think it's the right read of the situation, I think there's a lot of concern about the health of young children," he said.

"It's obviously just one small part of an overall healthy schools policy."

Kennedy said Ontario will continue its push to get junk food out of elementary schools and replace it with healthier foods.

"Our goal is to have a complete ban on junk food in elementary schools," he said.

School boards and snack food companies are cooperating as the government moves in this direction, he said.

During last October's election, the Liberals promised to get junk food vending machines out of the province's schools.

A report Tuesday said Refreshments Canada, a lobby group for Coke, Pepsi and other soft-drink companies, had decided to voluntarily withdraw its carbonated drinks from Canadian elementary schools by the beginning of the next school year.

While the group believes all its products are appropriate for schoolchildren, but it has read the mood of Canadian parents.

"There will be no carbonated beverages offered in elementary and middle schools in Canada as of September 2004," Calla Farn, director of public affairs for the organization, told the Calgary Herald Monday.

The decision was taken in response to concerns by parents.

Kennedy said that since the companies are voluntarily withdrawing those soda pop products, there will be no financial penalties to Ontario school boards, many who have signed long-term contracts with soft-drink companies. Boards had expressed concern that they could face hefty fines if they unilaterally banned the soft-drink products from schools.

Refreshments Canada represents more than 30 brands of non-alcoholic beverages from pops and juices to iced teas and coffees.

In place of carbonated drinks, Coke and Pepsi have begun stocking their vending machines with their brand of fruit drinks, water and sports drinks.