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**Philadelphia to Ban Sodas From Its Schools**

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Sodas are out. Juice is in.

The Philadelphia School District plans to impose one of the nation's toughest beverage policies later this year, banning sodas, iced teas, and other sweetened drinks from all vending machines and school cafeterias.

The new policy, which is expected to be officially approved Wednesday by the School Reform Commission, will allow only water, milk and 100 percent juice to be sold in the schools, effective June 30. Sales of "sports" drinks will be permitted in high school athletic areas.

Students will be allowed to bring their own soft drinks to school if they choose, according to district officials.

"This new policy places the health of our students first," said James Nevels chairman of the School Reform Commission. "Just as unsafe schools hamper learning, unhealthy foods can have the same effect... This policy will go a long way in making a difference."

Paul Vallas, the school district's chief executive, said yesterday that the stricter beverage policy would be followed by a review of snacks sold in the schools. He also wants schools to offer more nutrition education.

As concern has increased over rising rates of childhood obesity and related health problems, school districts across the nation have begun to set stricter standards on food and drinks sold at school. Locally, suburban districts have been watching Philadelphia's beverage debates.

Philadelphia's proposed policy is similar to one established in New York last year. The Los Angeles Unified School District has banned soft drinks and moved to end junk-food sales. The American Academy of Pediatrics urged its members this month to help eliminate sweetened drinks in schools.

Philadelphia's policy "is definitely part of a trend that is increasing and intensifying," said Robert Gottlieb, director of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College in Los Angeles.

Tracy Fox, a Washington nutrition policy consultant, said the district's would be among the "best standards" she has seen across the country: "It is a strong message, powerful."

The issue came to attention in Philadelphia in the spring when the school district solicited bids for an exclusive beverage contract to stock its 700 vending machines and encouraged companies to consider options and increase revenue. Nutrition advocates argued that the district should limit, not enhance, students' consumption of sweetened drinks. By summer, Vallas had pledged to ban soft drinks from the schools.

"This is a terrific policy, and is a great step for the school district to take," said Duane Perry, executive director of the Food Trust in Philadelphia, which has advocated a stricter nutrition policy in the schools. "It shows that the school district really wants to take a leadership position on a national level."

Vallas said yesterday that the policy "was never about money. It was about standards and the message it sends."

He said the policy would not be a "budget-buster." The district could lose \$500,000 by limiting the beverage selection because of reduced sales.

Domenic Celenza, vice president for cold-drink sales with the Philadelphia Coca-Cola Bottling Co., said he was unsure how the policy would affect overall sales in the district for Coke and its competitors. He said his company would like to continue selling Minute Maid juices and Dasani water in Philadelphia schools.