
The Buffalo News

Parent Power Can Get Soda out of the Schools

August 26, 2005

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Retrieved 08/29/05 from

<http://www.buffalonews.com/editorial/20050826/1036518.asp>

Buffalo was one of the first school districts to go soda-free. Its suburbs should now follow suit.

The Parents Advocating School Accountability likes an inspiring quote by Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a group of concerned citizens can change the world - indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Because of the aggressive lobbying of a couple corporations, soda in school took off in mid-1998. Jude Maculec, a parent with two high-school-age children, explained: "These companies aren't stupid. They're selling a way of life; if a kid grows up drinking Coke, he becomes a lifelong Coke drinker."

Things now may be reaching a tipping point, and it is time for parents, nutritionists and medical doctors and dentists to finish the job and encourage schools and soda companies to pull soda out of public schools entirely.

Ellen Brown, a parent and coordinator for MOVE, a Montana group promoting healthful eating and physical activity, would send this message to Coke and Pepsi: "Stop hurting our kids."

Arizona's Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Horne, who just announced new rules for his state, says, "There's got to be better ways for schools to make money than push sugar on kids."

The largest school districts in the United States and Canada have gone soda-free, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Boston, Seattle, Austin, Scranton, Pittsburgh, Montreal, Quebec City and many more. They agree: Kids' health matters. Practice what you teach. Model good choices.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has railed against soda in schools, saying it was "ludicrous" to sell soft drinks in school and that we were destroying our children with soda and junk food.

It began getting even more scary when the studies started coming in linking type 2 diabetes and soda. "A couple of decades ago, we didn't even start looking for type 2 diabetes if a person was under the age of 45. That's out the window now," said Dr. Julian Naylor, director of the Alaska Native Medical Center Diabetes Program.

"Across the country, parents are saying they don't want their kids for sale. Not their time, not their health, not for sale," notes Gary Ruskin, executive director of Commercial Alert.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich of Illinois explained: "It's one thing for a parent to be vigilant at home in terms of the diet they provide for their kids, and then suddenly, they send them to school and all bets are off when they have access to vending machines with candy bars and soda pop."

E-mail your legislators and your school board. Show the corporations who has more clout when it comes to the health of the children of your community and state. Show them the power of a good idea. As the Parents Advocating School Accountability Web page says, quoting Gandhi: "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win."

Ross Getman of Syracuse is the father of a 5-year-old who thinks soda is bad for you.

Soda in School

<http://www.schoolpouringrights.com>