

# **Empty Calories: Commercializing Activities in America's Schools**

**The Eighth-Annual Report on Schoolhouse  
Commercialism Trends: 2004-2005**

**By**

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## **Executive Summary**

This year's Schoolhouse Commercialism Trends report finds that schools continue to be a prime target of a wide variety of corporate advertising efforts and criticism of marketing to children in schools is mounting. Most of this criticism is directed at marketing activities that are thought to have a negative impact on children's health. Public debate has led to government regulation and bans of commercial activity in some school districts; however, commercial interests show few serious signs of pulling back.

From July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005, the Education Policy Studies Laboratory's Commercialism in Education Research Unit at Arizona State University conducted media database searches in Education Index, Google News and Lexis-Nexis, and recorded a total of 5,929 media references related to schoolhouse commercialism. These references were grouped into eight categories and two supplementary searches (new to this year's report), each of which is listed below and followed by its definition:

- **Corporate Sponsorship of Programs and Activities:** Corporations paying for or subsidizing school events or one-time activities in return for the right to associate their name with the events and activities. For example, NBC, Campbell’s Soup, and Scholastic teamed up to promote NBC’s dramatic series “American Dreams” by sponsoring an essay contest—with a \$100,000 scholarship as first prize—for high school students.
- **Exclusive Agreements:** Agreements between schools and corporations that give corporations the exclusive right to sell and promote their goods or services in the school district—for example, exclusive pouring rights for Pepsi-Cola or Coca-Cola.
- **Incentive Programs:** Corporate programs that provide money, goods, or services to a student, school, or school district when its students, parents, or staff engage in a specified activity—for example, Pizza Hut’s “Book It” program.
- **Appropriation of Space:** The allocation of school space such as scoreboards, rooftops, bulletin boards, walls, and textbooks on which corporations may place corporate logos or advertising messages for a wide range of products, including soft drinks and snack foods.
- **Sponsored Education Materials:** Materials supplied by corporations or trade associations that claim to have an instructional content, such as Starbucks Coffee’s “Ask, Listen, Learn: Kids and Alcohol Don’t Mix.”
- **Electronic Marketing:** The provision of electronic programming, equipment, or both in return for the right to advertise to students or their

families and community members in the school or when they contact the school or district. The most dominant example is Channel One which furnishes television equipment to schools in return for a requirement that students watch a 12-minute news program, including two minutes of commercials.

- **Privatization:** Management of public schools or school programs by private, for-profit corporations or other non-public entities. For example, K12, Inc. manages virtual schools under state charter schooling laws and enrolls students who take online classes from home.
- **Fundraising:** Commercial programs marketed to schools to raise funds for school programs and activities, including door-to-door sales, affinity marketing programs, and similar ventures. For example, Schoolpop Inc. Schoolpop markets technology in partnership with corporations to administer “Scrip” programs that encourage parents to shop at designated stores in return for a donation back to the school
- **Children’s Health (*supplementary search*):** Issues that address the nutritional value of school food offerings and regulations that aim to improve the health of students by regulating what foods can be offered in the cafeterias, canteens, and vending machines.
- **Commercialism (*supplementary search*):** Issues about commercialism in schools that do not qualify for the more specific categories of the report, including references to legislation regulating commercialism in schools and scholarly articles collected from the education press.

2004-2005 is in a transition year with regard to methodology. Changes in the methodology and the addition of two supplementary searches make it impossible to accurately establish trends within a particular category of commercialism. With regard to overall trends, however, the 2004-2005 findings suggest that the overall number of citations is about the same as the total recorded in the 2003-2004 period.

The 2004-2005 references reflect a far more pervasive context of criticism and debate over schoolhouse commercialism, particularly with regard to commercialism practices that are perceived to have an impact on children's health. Efforts to rein in these practices were most visible in the area of exclusive contracts (mostly vending contracts). It is clear that there is growing concern over childhood obesity and the role that schoolhouse commercialism may play in its increase. The impact of government regulation is powerful; however, despite the restrictive regulations or in some instances outright bans on schools selling soft drinks or junk food, some schools and districts continue to sign new exclusive contracts with soft-drink and snack vendors.

A relatively new phenomenon that helps to promote commercialism in schools is the role played by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The increasing emphasis on test scores as measures of achievement and on numerical accountability measures has created a context in which incentive programs may be particularly enticing for schools seeking to boost those test scores. NCLB's consideration of attendance rates also has led to attendance-incentive programs in some schools.

Instances of overheated rhetoric and deep-pockets lobbying illustrate how controversial advertising in schools has become. As a result, those who benefit from it are fighting harder than ever to retain their access to the nation's schoolchildren. The

choice is increasingly stark for school leaders, who will have to decide whether their jobs entail providing an education to their students or offering them up as “untapped points of entry” to marketers.

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## **Introduction**

The Texas agriculture commissioner is not the sort of person one would expect to be depicted in jackboots, but when Susan Combs, a Republican, issued new regulations toughening the state's policies on junk food in schools, her critics reacted swiftly. Combs instituted a ban on sodas and candy bars in schools and restrictions on cookies and chips. While the policy won praise from the School Nutrition Association, the rhetoric soon heated up. Talk show hosts castigated her as a "Food Nazi," as if limiting children's access to unhealthy snacks was the moral equivalent of genocide.<sup>1</sup> And she was not alone: Maine State Rep. Sean Flaircloth, defending a proposed state tax on sodas to be used to help combat childhood obesity, found himself attacked not only as a "Nazi" but as a "communist."<sup>2</sup>

The heated language mirrors the aggressive lobbying tactics some soft drink makers have undertaken to fight bans on their products in the nation's public schools. In Connecticut, Coke and Pepsi succeeded in delaying a bill to ban soda and junk food

vending machines in schools after marshalling an extensive lobbying campaign that enlisted union beverage-truck drivers, school coaches, and school boards. Between them, the Connecticut lobbyists working for Coke and Pepsi on the legislation were paid a reported \$130,000 a year, with an additional \$7,350 a month going to one of the firms.<sup>3</sup>

Overheated rhetoric and deep-pockets lobbying are two illustrations of how controversial advertising in schools has become: a principal finding in the 2004-2005 survey of Trends in Schoolhouse Commercialism. As a result, those who benefit from it are fighting harder than ever to retain their access to the nation's schoolchildren.

This year's report on Trends in Schoolhouse Commercialism, undertaken by the Commercialism in Education Research Unit of the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University, finds a landscape that is at once stable and shifting. The annual study, which tallies media references to commercial activities in public schools as an indirect measure of those activities, found the numbers of citations largely in keeping with those of recent years. Changes in the method of calculating citations make comparing this year's results with those of previous years necessarily inexact. It is clear, however, that the coverage of commercial activities in schools describes mounting criticism of marketing to children in school, especially if marketing activities are thought to have a negative impact on children's health.

## **Defining and Measuring Schoolhouse Commercialism**

Schoolhouse commercialism includes a wide range of corporate marketing activities. It entails the use of schools by businesses as a venue to promote their products



and services to students and their families as well as to reinforce the value of consumption as the golden road to happiness.

Since 1998, CERU researchers have tracked citations archived in the Lexus-Nexus all-news, marketing and business databases, as well as in the Education Index. In addition, Google news alerts were created to identify popular press references in media outlets not retrievable from Lexus-Nexus all-news to compile data for the annual report. Using search terms unique to each of the eight categories of schoolhouse commercialism, researchers tally citations for each search in order to observe trends in media references that fall within those categories. (See Appendix A for a more complete discussion of this report's methodology.)

The categories of commercialism tracked in the 2004-2005 report are:

**1. Sponsorship of Programs and Activities:** Corporations paying for or subsidizing school events or one-time activities in return for the right to associate their name with the events and activities. This may also include school contests.

Corporate interests sponsor a wide range of school activities and programs. Many are at arms' length, involving donations of funds, scholarships, or merchandise, often through separate, corporate-affiliated foundations. Others engage schools and corporate donors more directly with each other, and the ways in which they serve corporate interests are readily visible.

NBC, Campbell's Soup, and Scholastic teamed up to promote NBC's dramatic series "American Dreams" by sponsoring an essay contest—with a \$100,000 scholarship as first prize—for high school students, coupled with a Scholastic curriculum on the essay topic: "How does your American dream compare to that of your parents?"

Materials from the contest were to be distributed to 60,000 high schools and expected to reach 11 million students.<sup>4</sup> The program also illustrates the seamlessness between marketing and popular entertainment; Campbell's soup products were to be "integrated into numerous episodes of the series," and a character in the show was to enter a similar essay contest.<sup>5</sup>

**2. Exclusive Agreements:** Agreements between schools and corporations that give corporations the exclusive right to sell and promote their goods or services in the school district — for example, exclusive pouring rights for Pepsi-Cola or Coca-Cola. In return, the district or school receives a percentage of the profits derived from the arrangement.

Coverage of exclusive agreements primarily revolves around contracts with soft drink and snack companies to provide and sell their products in school vending machines. Such programs are widespread, viewed by schools as opportunities to raise additional funds from food marketers, and increasingly controversial. Growing concern over childhood obesity and the role that schoolhouse commercialism may play in its increase has notably changed the tenor of coverage of exclusive agreements; increasingly, stories have focused on criticism and controversy surrounding such contracts, and on means of reining them in.

**3. Incentive Programs:** Corporate programs that provide money, goods, or services to a student, school, or school district when its students, parents, or staff engage in a specified activity.

Incentive programs offer students or classrooms commercial products in return for achieving certain academic goals. Such programs go back as far as 20 years, with the

founding in 1985 of “Book It!” operated by Pizza Hut, which offers students coupons for free pizza in return for reading a specified number of extra-curricular books. But the increasing emphasis on test scores as measures of achievement, starting with the federal No Child Left Behind Act, and on numerical accountability measures of all kinds, has created a context in which incentive programs may be particularly enticing for schools seeking to boost those test scores.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, NCLB’s consideration of attendance rates has led to attendance-incentive programs in some schools.<sup>7</sup> Examples are numerous and varied: Children with perfect attendance at summer school in Kansas City, MO, were awarded a prepaid Visa card worth \$125.<sup>8</sup> Cargokids, a unit of the retailer Pier 1 Imports, said it would give \$2,000 shopping sprees to two elementary students with perfect attendance, and Dell Computers said it would give laptops to two middle school students.<sup>9</sup>

**4. Appropriation of Space:** The allocation of school space such as scoreboards, rooftops, bulletin boards, walls, and textbooks on which corporations may place corporate logos or advertising messages for a wide range of products, including soft drinks and snack foods.

Increasingly, schools and school districts are awarding “naming rights” to corporate donors who give money—which is tax-deductible to the corporation—for school buildings and maintenance. In Florida, for instance, Park Vista High School in Boynton Beach named its new stadium G.L. Homes Stadium after a home-building contracting firm that paid \$150,000. A local medical center, meanwhile, paid \$75,000 and got its name put on a school health career academy.<sup>10</sup>

**5. Sponsored Educational Materials (SEMs):** Materials supplied by corporations or trade associations that claim to have an instructional content.

Starbucks Coffee has added its support to a program called “Ask, Listen, Learn: Kids and Alcohol Don’t Mix,” a multimedia program offered to middle schools nationwide that purports to provide “both parents and kids with information and strategies to help facilitate conversation about the dangers of underage drinking.”<sup>11</sup> The relevance of the program to Starbucks’ own corporate interests becomes clear with the knowledge that Starbucks has developed with distiller Jim Beam a coffee-based alcoholic beverage. The product has come under fire from alcohol-industry critics, who charge both companies with covertly marketing to underage drinkers.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the in-school campaign is the product of The Century Council, an organization formed by distillers to combat underage drinking and drunken driving—and to counteract calls for stricter regulations of alcoholic beverages.<sup>13</sup>

**6. Electronic Marketing:** The provision of electronic programming, equipment, or both in return for the right to advertise to students or their families and community members in the school or when they contact the school or district.

Electronic Marketing refers to in-school marketing programs using broadcast, Internet, or related media. Channel One News, which furnishes television equipment to schools in return for a requirement that students watch a 12-minute news program, including two minutes of commercials, remains the dominant company and program in this category. This category also entails coverage of a variety of other developments and trends, including the intersection of commercial interests in cable television and on the Internet with education.

**7. Privatization:** Management of schools or school programs by private, for-profit corporations or other non-public entities.

Interest in private management of public schools has continued to grow, encouraged by provisions in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 that mandate “failing” schools be reorganized or to turn their management over to private firms. Additionally, the growth of so-called “virtual charter schools” that are organized under state charter schooling laws and enroll students who take lessons at home using an online has spurred the expansion of school privatization efforts. One of the leading virtual charter school firms is K12 Inc., until recently headed by former education secretary William Bennett; K12 provides curriculum and organizational guidance to the establishment of virtual charters in a number of states, and has seen its revenue multiply tenfold in two years, to \$65 million.<sup>14</sup>

**8. Fundraising:** Commercial programs marketed to schools to raise funds for school programs and activities, including door-to-door sales, affinity marketing programs, and similar ventures. One example that appears to be on the leading edge for this trend is Schoolpop Inc. Schoolpop markets technology in partnership with corporations that include Accel Partners and American Express to administer “Scrip” programs that encourage parents to shop at designated stores and in return for a donation back to the school.<sup>15</sup>

## *Supplemental Searches for 2004 - 2005*

In addition to searching on the eight categories described above, supplementary searches designed to capture important schoolhouse commercialism activities were conducted and they focused on **children's health** and **commercialism**.

### **Children's Health**

The Children's Health searches recover articles that address the nutritional value of school food offerings and regulations that aim to improve the health of students by regulating what foods can be offered in the cafeterias, canteens, and vending machines. Such regulations directly affect school business relationships with corporations that may sell such products on school grounds.

Children's health has emerged as a recurring theme in media coverage of school-based commercial activities. Stories with a children's health dimension—childhood obesity, corporate responsibility in marketing, the promotion and sale of foods of minimal nutritional value in school, and the role of schools in promoting student physical fitness, among them—appeared frequently across a wide spectrum of searches. In addition, many articles clearly covered school-related child health and general school commercialism issues without fitting neatly into the existing categories.

### **Commercialism**

The Commercialism searches recover articles that address commercialism in schools but that do not qualify for the more specific categories of the report. This search includes, but is not limited to, articles that reference legislation regulating commercialism in schools and scholarly articles collected from the education press.

## ***Modified Methods for 2004-2005***

For the 2004-2005 report, media citations were counted for the entire months of June 2004 through March 2005. For the final three months of the survey, April through June of 2005, the research counted citations for one randomly selected week each month, then calculated projected numbers of citations for the entire month. The final three months' projections were then added to the numbers collected for the first nine months of the survey period, and the annual total number of articles was calculated according to three different scenarios, resulting in low, high, and mid-range estimates of the number of citations for the year. The mid-range estimate incorporates the mean estimated number of articles for the April-June period. The low estimate incorporates the lower bound of the 95 percent confidence interval of the mean estimated number of articles for the period, while the high estimate is calculated using the upper bound 95 percent confidence interval of the mean estimated number of articles for the period. Details of the methodology are described in Appendix A. Complete data, including low, mid-range, and high estimates, are set forth in Appendix B. The numbers that follow rely on the mid-range estimates.

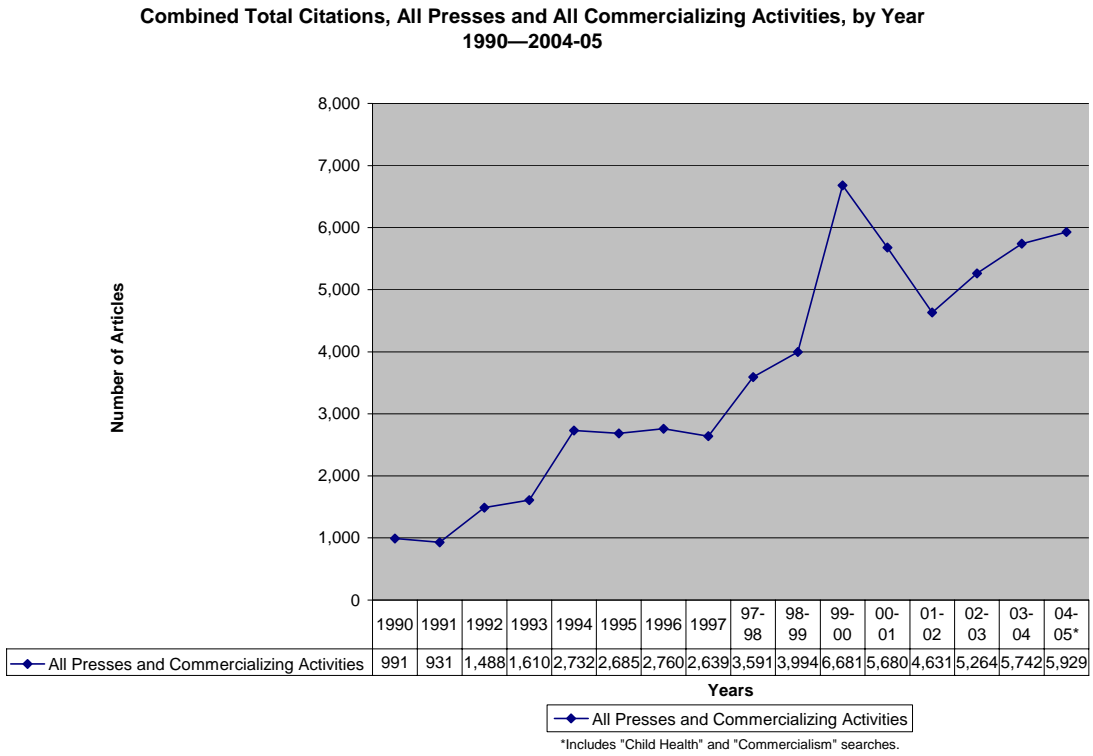
## **Presentation of Findings for 2004-2005**

Between July 1, 2004, and June 30, 2005, the Trends Report research counted a total of **5,929** media references to school commercialism. Of those:

- **5,154**, or **86.9 percent**, were from the popular press, both from Lexis-Nexis and from Google News;
- **344**, or **5.8 percent**, were from the business press;

- **404**, or **6.8 percent**, were from the advertising press; and
- **26**, or **0.4 percent**, were from the education press.

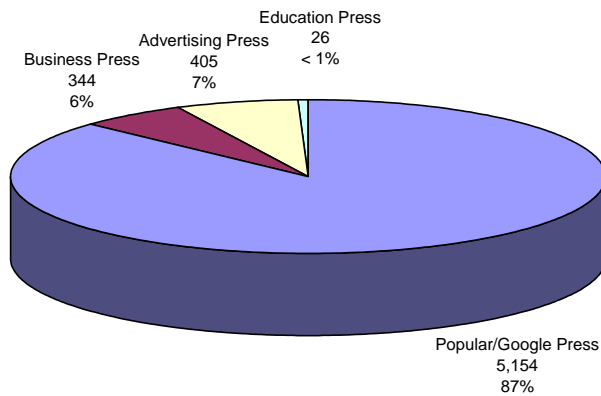
**Figure 1: Combined total citations, All Presses, All Categories: 1990—2004-2005**





**Figure 2: Combined total citations, All Categories: 2004-2005, by Press**

**Citations by Press and Percentage of Total Citations Represented by Each Press  
2004-2005**



By category, the number of citations and their share of the total were as follows:

- 1. Corporate Sponsorship of School Activities: 1,524, or 25.7 percent;**
- 2. Exclusive Agreements: 361, or 6.1 percent;**
- 3. Incentive Programs: 118, or 2 percent;**
- 4. Appropriation of Space: 357, or 6 percent;**
- 5. Sponsored Educational Materials: 376, or 6.3 percent**
- 6. Electronic Marketing: 213, or 3.6 percent;**
- 7. Privatization: 592, or 10 percent;**
- 8. Fundraising: 302, or 5.1 percent.**

For the supplemental searches, the number of citations and their share of the total were as follows:

**Children’s Health: 1,901, or 32 percent;**

**Commercialism: 185, or 3.1 percent.**

## **Discussion of Findings**

Changes in the methodology and the addition of two supplemental searches to the 2004-2005 report makes it impossible to accurately establish trends within a particular category of commercialism. Beginning with the 2005-2006 report it should, once again, be possible to describe a long term trend for each category with some confidence. Despite the inability to establish precise trend information, the mid-range estimates developed for the 2004-2005 report suggest that the overall number of citations is about the same as the total recorded for the 2003-2004 period.

The 2004-2005 references reflect a far more pervasive context of criticism and debate over schoolhouse commercialism, particularly with regard to commercialism practices that are perceived to have an impact on children’s health. This is reflected, for example, in community debates over such matters as exclusive vending contracts in individual school districts. When considered in relation to the citations captured in the “Children’s Health” searches, it is clear that there is growing concern over childhood obesity and the role that schoolhouse commercialism may play in its increase.

### ***The Scope of Schoolhouse Commercialism***

Schoolhouse commercialism is diverse. Its forms are as varied as a 10-year, exclusive contract with Coca-Cola in Manatee County, FL,<sup>16</sup> and a good-behavior incentive program sponsored by Ameriquest Mortgage Co. that provides baseball ticket vouchers to students “caught by school officials performing kind acts.”<sup>17</sup> It is seen in

advertising on school buses and corporately sponsored field trips. It comes in the form of required television advertising viewing in classrooms and private management of tax-funded charter schools.

Consider the following disparate examples:

- Some 90,000 classrooms in the U.S. participate in Book It!, according to a Pizza Hut news release.<sup>18</sup> As part of a 2004 promotion of Book It!’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the company awarded a South Carolina elementary school \$20,000 as part of a contest in which students were enlisted to submit “a creative birthday wish” for the program’s anniversary.<sup>19</sup> Other incentive programs include a similar reading promotion sponsored by the fast food chain Subway, grade-incentive programs sponsored by McDonald’s and Denny’s restaurants, and a reward program from Papa Joe’s pizza restaurants that recognizes young people for their “acts of kindness.”<sup>20</sup>
- The Security Analysts of San Francisco, in the name of promoting financial literacy, sponsors various programs in Bay Area high schools. Its efforts include free subscriptions of *The Wall Street Journal* Classroom Edition; a curriculum for in-class presentation by securities industry professionals; sponsorship of field trips to the San Francisco Financial District; and sponsorship of school teams in an inter-scholastic “stock picking game” that promotes stock market investing.<sup>21</sup>
- The publisher Scholastic Inc. has been involved for years in sponsoring a variety of classroom programs and materials. In coordination with the

National Council for the Social Studies, Scholastic Inc. provides the council's middle school social studies teacher of the year with a classroom subscription to its Junior Scholastic magazine.<sup>22</sup> In another contest, the company capitalized on the common classroom "show and tell" exercise by creating a contest asking students to send pictures of their favorite show-and-tell objects long with a sentence describing their selection. Ten winners in grades K-1 were to be awarded a trip to New York for a ceremony tied in with Scholastic's "Ready Freddy" book series.<sup>23</sup>

- Marvel Enterprises handed out a six-week lesson plan for classrooms in Grades 2 through 4 consisting of a Fantastic Four comic book aimed at promoting student self-esteem. An account in *Daily Variety* openly described the effort as a promotion of the summer movie *The Fantastic Four* that would "introduce the Fantastic Four franchise to a core demo [demographic group] and foster brand awareness"<sup>24</sup> in the weeks running up to the movie's release.

As varied as they are, all of these examples have one thing in common: the corporations involved get an opportunity to promote their names, their products, their ideas or all three, to students, educators, and families.

### ***Persistent Trends in Commercialism***

Certainly much of what has surfaced in the 2004-2005 report represents more of the same kind of activities reported in earlier years. For instance, some corporate curricula are longstanding. One is sponsored by the Hartford Financial Services Group, which sells fire insurance and for 60 years has been distributing a fire-safety curriculum

in schools.<sup>25</sup> Another program, sponsored in California schools by the Dairy Council of California, distributes to more than 90 percent of the state's school districts a package of health and nutrition lessons, called "Camp Eatawella," delivered on CD-Rom, along with student activities and pre- and post-assessments. Published reports are ambiguous on the age of the program, which may date in some form to as far back as 1983.<sup>26</sup>

Despite restrictive regulations or in some instances outright bans on schools selling soft drinks or junk food, some schools and districts continue to sign new exclusive contracts with soft-drink and snack vendors. Incentive programs, similarly, are nothing new, nor are they limited to food. The National Basketball Association puts on assemblies with NBA players as part of its "Read to Achieve" incentive program.<sup>27</sup> In Massachusetts, Lowell High School offered seniors free laptop computers worth \$1,200, donated by area colleges or businesses or paid for through fund-raising efforts, if the students maintained "excellent" attendance and were accepted to college or the military.<sup>28</sup> Trimble Tech High School in Fort Worth, Texas, recorded a jump in attendance of nearly three percentage points, to 94.7 percent, after announcing eligible students would be entered in a drawing for a 2001 Ford Mustang car; the school was one of several in the city that gave away cars, most of them donated by car dealers, in similar drawings.<sup>29</sup> On a smaller scale, a Baltimore hair salon, Diamonds and Divas, gave away one style or cut a month to fifth-graders from Brehms Lane Elementary school who were selected for a combination of "grades, attitude, attendance and citizenship."<sup>30</sup>

## ***Justifications for Schoolhouse Commercialism.***

While much of what the 2004-2005 research has uncovered represents a continuation of past trends and practices, there are new developments in the phenomenon. One is the role of No Child Left Behind in helping to promote commercialism in schools, sometimes in ways that were evidently unintended, and other times in ways that are consciously built into the legislation. For example, a newspaper report linked a wide variety of donations to schools in 2004 by 250 businesses in and around Virginia's Newport News area to schools' efforts to improve test scores under the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).<sup>31</sup> Executives of one such corporate donor, Northrop Grumman, which gives about \$70,000 a year to the city's schools, cited the need for more students literate in math and science for their workforce, as well as for the good of the larger society.<sup>32</sup> In another example, the increasing emphasis on test scores as measures of achievement, starting with NCLB, and on numerical accountability measures of all kinds, has created a context in which incentive programs may be particularly enticing for schools seeking to boost those test scores.<sup>33</sup> NCLB's consideration of attendance rates also has led to attendance-incentive programs in some schools.<sup>34</sup>

## ***Why Schools Allow Commercialism***

The perceived benefit of corporate involvement in schools leads many educational leaders to embrace it. A newspaper profile of Baltimore city schools chief Bonnie Copeland prominently listed the official's success at recording "at least 100 new or revived partnerships" with corporate donors among her accomplishments.<sup>35</sup> In Baton Rouge, La., a newly elected mayor vowed to use his office (which does not control

schools) as a bully pulpit to promote corporate donations to schools.<sup>36</sup> Seeking more corporate sponsorship has continued to be a frequent talking point for school board candidates.<sup>37</sup> Clearly marketing does not define the entire universe of corporate activities in schools. It is apparent, however, that many of the activities labeled “partnerships” or “charitable donations” are, in fact, little more than advertising schemes.

For some observers, the reason for the continued spread of schoolhouse commercialism is obvious. “If the Legislature provided sufficient money for a high-quality education system, school districts in Southwest Florida and other regions of the state would feel less tempted to engage in questionable money-making schemes to try to cover their financial shortfalls,” wrote the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* on December 27, 2004. The newspaper offered twin recommendations: banning the sale of high-calorie drinks and reforming state education funding so as to “make the sweet deals from soft-drink makers less tempting.”<sup>38</sup>

A proposal in Salina, Kansas, further illustrates the reasons behind schools’ continued interest in such agreements. Seeking to install artificial turf in the school district’s stadium—a \$450,000 expense—a private group suggested an exclusive contract with Pepsi could help pay for the proposal.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Why Corporations Advertise in Schools***

Corporations want to be in schools because, very simply, they offer access to a huge market, both in the form of children themselves as consumers, and in the form of children as influencers of their parents’ consumption choices. In short, there’s money in the schoolhouse, and marketers know it.

At the mildest end of the spectrum, corporations benefit from their in-school marketing programs through public goodwill and recognition as a result of being involved in the schools. A typical example is in Pasco County, Florida, where the Pasco Education Foundation welcomed into its “hall of fame” a group of business partners who were recognized for their longevity in forming business partnerships with the local public school systems.<sup>40</sup>

But corporate interests range much further than goodwill alone. While some corporately sponsored school activities and programs may not be out of self-interest, others plainly are. The oil producer BP distributed \$2 million in grants to 1,075 California teachers to teach about energy and energy conservation. The grants, which were \$5,000 and \$10,000 each, were awarded to teachers who submitted applications proposing in-class and out-of-class activities to teach the subjects<sup>41</sup>—and can be expected to burnish BP’s image as a promoter of conservation at a time when the oil industry is under renewed scrutiny as a result of skyrocketing energy prices.

Some programs may be little more than a thin veneer for outright selling. For example, Wild Oats Markets donated pedometers to schools in Superior, CO, in the name of promoting more healthful eating; the schoolchildren obliged by walking from the school to the store the day of the store’s grand opening.<sup>42</sup>

Corporations do not merely seek to promote name brand recognition or product lines. Sometimes they seek to influence public policy discussion by communicating directly to children. Manufacturers of all-terrain vehicles have sponsored materials including a teacher’s guide, a student activity booklet, a brochure for parents, and a classroom poster “to promote all-terrain vehicle (ATV) safety and environmental-friendly



riding.” The materials were prepared for the industry by Lifetime Learning Systems, a custom publisher of educational materials affiliated with WRC Media, which also publishes the Weekly Reader.<sup>43</sup> The ATV industry’s interest in presenting a particular spin on safety may be understood in light of reports such as “Children and ATVs: Riding in Harm’s Way,” by Kentucky Youth Advocates, which documents disproportionate levels of injury among young ATV users,<sup>44</sup> and calls by some to ban adult-sized ATVs for youngsters.<sup>45</sup> (Other Lifetime Learning partnerships include one with Purdue Pharma, on the dangers of prescription drug abuse.)<sup>46</sup>

WCI Communities, a residential real estate development company in southwestern Florida, sponsored visits by seventh grade science students that included “water monitoring experiments ... recycling workshops, tours of a ‘green’ demonstration home and Learning Lab and a ‘Wonders of Nature’ wildlife show.”<sup>47</sup> The potentially self-serving benefits of the program to the developing company are clear in the reaction of Cindy Scholotterback, an approving teacher: “WCI demonstrated ways it preserves the land, such as recycling resources, energy conservation, and their commitment to green building,” she said.<sup>48</sup>

Some sponsored educational materials do not appear to relate directly to the product lines of the companies that offer them. This appears to be the case with Sprint’s anti-bullying curriculum, consisting of 24 videos plus additional materials, which the company gave to 70 schools in metropolitan Kansas City, MO, where Sprint is based.<sup>49</sup> Doubletree Hotels sponsored “My Vote Makes A Difference,” an elementary school curriculum on voting—complete with a “national cookie election”—in conjunction with Kids Voting USA. Yet while it may have appeared to be a civics lesson, Doubletree’s

sponsorship was in fact a case of canny branding: the hotel touts among its own special amenities the provision of chocolate chip cookies to guests at check-in.<sup>50</sup>

Other connections are more transparent, such as a local pizza parlor in the Norfolk, VA, area hosting third-graders who learned “business economics” during their visit.<sup>51</sup> In April 2005, U.S. Department of Agriculture released its new “Food Guidance System” replacing the traditional Food Pyramid. Subsequently, the Grocery Manufacturers of America, in partnership with Weekly Reader Corp. Consumer and Custom Publishing, announced plans to distribute 58,000 posters to Weekly Reader teacher subscribers with a teacher’s guide; student activities involving nutrition, science, and math; and a brochure for parents in Spanish and English. The association estimated its materials would reach 4 million students.<sup>52</sup> Yet critics of the food industry have charged that the new food pyramid replacement reflects undue industry influence, and that it mirrors the industry’s practice of emphasizing exercise and downplaying or ignoring the inherent nutritional harm of certain foods.<sup>53</sup>

Then there is the “Pop Rocks Laboratory.” With an apparently straight face, the candy company Pop Rocks Inc. has advertised in science magazines such as Science Reader and Science Scope a lesson plan featuring Pop Rocks candy, suggesting a science experiment that involves mixing the carbon-dioxide-impregnated candy with other ingredients in a test tube, where children can watch it foam and explode. “It promotes science,” the candy maker’s vice president of sales, Mitch Boehm, told a trade publication.<sup>54</sup> At its web site, the company advertises school discounts.<sup>55</sup>

## *Considering How Commercialism Works:*

### *Channel One and Field Trip Factory*

Two companies that received extensive coverage in the 2004-2005 research provide detailed examples of how schoolhouse commercialism works in practice. Each provides a model for the larger trend. One is Channel One News, now a longstanding fixture in the world of schoolhouse commercialism. The other is Field Trip Factory, a relative newcomer to the phenomenon, but one that has achieved a striking degree of growth.

#### **Channel One**

Channel One News, which furnishes television equipment to schools in return for a requirement that students watch a 12-minute news program, including two minutes of commercials, has been a longstanding emblem of schoolhouse commercialism. Coverage of Channel One largely emerges in the Trends Report's searches on Electronic Marketing (Category 6), for which the company is the dominant example. Coverage of the subject in 2004-2005 largely echoed that of previous years' reports.

Channel One's defenders often present it as a helpful contribution to children's civics education. Indeed, the network has won two Peabody Awards for public service in broadcasting, the most recent in April 2005.<sup>56</sup> With interest high in the 2004 presidential election, for example, Channel One conducted OneVote, a mock ballot, with results from local schools released to their home communities.<sup>57</sup> (Channel One also has received a spike in publicity with attention given to one of its alumnae, Anderson Cooper, now a star news anchor for Cable News Network.)<sup>58</sup>

But Channel One also engages in marketing partnerships that blend educational aims with blatant commercial promotion. Clearasil was an advertising sponsor of its OneVote election project.<sup>59</sup> Along with the gum manufacturer Wrigley, Channel One staged a private concert for 10 teens “making a difference in their communities” who were selected by participating in an essay contest; tapes of the concert were to be sent to middle and high schools.<sup>60</sup> Channel One’s “Hacienda on Wheels” is a bus that travels to school sites as network employees tape their daily news programs. The videogame company Activision used the program to promote its Tony Hawk Underground 2 and Spiderman 2 games. That particular promotion scored points in a video game trade publication, which wrote: “Good thinking outside the box on Activision’s part, because marketing into high schools is a tough and sensitive area that Primedia’s Channel One figured out long ago. There are in fact a number of untapped points of entry into the high school and middle school markets, including a number of sports pubs [publications] that schools allow through their well-guarded marketing filters.”<sup>61</sup>

And still other Channel One promotion projects show no evident academic purpose. The company and Warner Bros. sponsored a sweepstakes to promote the opening of the Warner Bros. movie “A Cinderella Story.” The winner, a 14-year-old Florida girl, received a trip to the movie’s July 10, 2004, premiere in Hollywood, a photo-opportunity with star Hillary Duff, and a Hollywood spa makeover.<sup>62</sup>

Channel One also remained the subject of recurring controversy. The Alabama State Board of Education in February 2005 approved language “recommending” that Channel One stop showing advertising promoting unhealthy lifestyles.<sup>63</sup> The board’s action apparently was no more than advisory and did not appear to take any concrete

steps to limit Channel One in Alabama Schools. The board's action followed testimony from Channel One critics who cited junk food advertising but also sexual content and allegedly violent language in some programming; a Channel One lobbyist dismissed the criticism as unfounded and the critics as extremists.<sup>64</sup>

The company has also long been criticized for the content of advertising that promote soda and junk foods. Indeed, the mounting controversy over marketing such foods in schools appears to have hurt Channel One economically. While U.S. ad spending rose 10 percent overall in 2004, Primedia's education unit—which is dominated by Channel One—saw ad revenue drop 12.3 percent for the year (to \$39.1 million) and 12.1 percent for the fourth quarter (to \$13.1 million).<sup>65</sup> Kraft, for instance, stopped advertising in schools in June 2003.<sup>66</sup> Interestingly, among several stories that covered a Channel One “fitness promotion”—the network enlisted middle-school classrooms to participate in a contest in which students wore pedometers, and the classroom logging the most steps would win \$1,500 in fitness equipment—none alluded to the controversy over junk food ads on the network.<sup>67</sup>

Company data suggest that after steady growth in its early years, Channel One, which is a unit of Primedia, has hit a plateau, with stagnant growth for a number of years. In 2004 the company reported its programming reached eight million students in 12,000 middle and high schools nationwide—numbers it has been reporting for several years.<sup>68</sup>

## **Field Trip Factory**

Field Trip Factory is another useful example of schoolhouse commercialism because it pulls together and illustrates a number of the ways in which commercialism in schools works and interacts with corporate goals as well as the potential harm it may

cause to public, not-for-profit institutions. Field Trip Factory is a relatively new for-profit venture that offers schools free field trips to commercial establishments, which pay Field Trip Factory for the exposure. Field Trip Factory has grown enormously. In late 2004 it was reported that the firm had more than doubled its operations over two years, organizing 12,000 field trips in 2003, up from 5,000 in 2001.<sup>69</sup> Most of the trips were to retailers: Saturn automobiles, Sports Authority, and Petco Stores were among the corporate sponsors.<sup>70</sup> According to one account of the company, Field Trip Factory's founder, Susan Singer, "insisted her trips were about educating, not marketing, and said no critic of Field Trip Factory had ever been on one of the trips." But, the article noted, Petco spokesman Shawn Underwood acknowledged that the field trips serve the company's interest. "Certainly, there is a branding element to just about anything you do when you're a retailer," Underwood told *The New York Sun*.<sup>71</sup> (Field Trip Factory is not alone. Retailers including Wegmans, a supermarket chain based in Rochester, N.Y., also offer schools field trips, which coincidentally promote the brands of the sponsor.)<sup>72</sup>

As with many incursions of commercial interests into the schools, the growth of Field Trip Factory appears to have been encouraged by monetary constraints on school systems. A New York commentary observed that financial straits—eighth-graders studying for state science tests must share microscopes, for instance—further encourage the use of such commercial ventures, asking whether a free trip to Petco could be "the city's solution for schools with no science labs?"<sup>73</sup> At the same time, however, Field Trip Factory's success may undermine a delicate web of community institutions such as museums and zoos, by siphoning off children from those entities and redirecting them to private retailers. "City museums and zoos may find it hard to compete," suggested

Marcia Biederman, writing in the *Gotham Gazette*. Noting that Field Trip Factory trips are not only free, but “seamless” for the schools involved, Biederman contrasts that experience with chaperoning requirements and waiting lists at some museums and fees elsewhere, such as the non-profit Queens County Farm Museum, whose director said could not survive without charging schools.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, like many such ventures, reactions to Field Trip Factory are mixed. “Kids are vulnerable,” said Alvin Poussaint, director of the Judge Baker’s Children’s Center at Harvard Medical School. “They don’t understand...they’re being marketed to.”<sup>75</sup> But Glen Brodowski, associate professor of marketing at California State University San Marcos, dismissed such concerns. “Of course these companies are marketing to children and trying to create more consumers, but I don’t necessarily think that’s insidious or evil,” he said. “We’re all trying to get something back, and nobody does something for purely benevolent reasons—except Mother Teresa.”<sup>76</sup>

## **Growing Criticism of Commercialism in Schools**

As criticism of commercialism in schools grew in 2004 and 2005, much of it focused on issues of health and nutrition. Efforts to rein in the practice were most visible in the area of exclusive contracts, but they were not limited to it.

Competitive forces and public opinion may be putting added pressure on vendors who sell soft drinks and junk food in schools. In Michigan, the Linden school district switched from Coke to Pepsi as its exclusive soft-drink vendor and obtained a five-year contract yielding more than \$51,000 annually, plus an additional \$10,000. A published report indicated the agreement offered higher commissions than the Coke contract, but

did not disclose comparison numbers.<sup>77</sup> Orange Unified Schools in southern California similarly switched to Pepsi, for \$1.5 million over five years.<sup>78</sup> A new contract in Easton, PA, was worth \$1.1 million over 10 years, replacing previous 10-year contracts in mid-term that was worth just \$30,000 according to a published report. (The unusual mid-term renegotiation followed questions about whether the earlier contract was valid.)<sup>79</sup>

Despite such anecdotal reports suggesting that exclusive agreements are becoming more lucrative (at least for some schools), there are others that suggest the deals remain less beneficial than they appear. In New York, for instance, a \$166-million contract with Snapple as an exclusive beverage vendor for the city, including in its school system, was offset by a \$700,000 deficit incurred by the city's marketing agency that negotiated the deal.<sup>80</sup> In California, the Lodi Unified School District's 10-year contract with Coke that originally was promoted as being worth from \$4 million to \$8 million when it was signed in 1999 proved to be a disappointment at the five-year mark. As of June 2004, the agreement had netted just \$759,000, which translates into \$1.6 million over the life of its 10-year span.<sup>81</sup>

Other questionable relationships have drawn fire. The *Dallas Morning News* disclosed in September 2004 that a former Dallas Independent School District superintendent received a \$6,000 consulting fee from the Coca-Cola-funded Council for Corporate and School Partnerships at the time that Coke held an exclusive vending contract with the district. (The official, Mike Moses, reportedly turned the fee over to a foundation that donates funds to innovative teachers and schools. Additionally, Moses did not take the superintendent's job until after the Coke contract was negotiated.)<sup>82</sup>



Indeed, regardless of the product or service involved, a Massachusetts case illustrates the dangers of exclusive agreements of any kind. In 2002, Massachusetts signed a sole-supplier contract with Wisconsin-based School Specialty Inc. Under terms of the agreement, SSI is the exclusive, no-bid supplier of paper, pencils, and other such items to all schools in the state. A state Inspector General's investigation, however, found that the company overcharged some districts, which found they could have obtained better prices by bidding the supply contracts out themselves. The company settled the case in June 2004, by giving 324 customer districts credit totaling \$396,000. Despite the outcome, however—and much to the frustration of the inspector general who uncovered the problem—the Operational Services Division of the administration of Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney indicated it would not cancel the contract before its March 2007 expiration date.<sup>83</sup>

### ***Contracts Grow More Controversial***

Increasingly, contracts are greeted with criticism. Besides the obvious issue of nutrition, other issues also spur complaints against soft-drink and junk-food deals. One is secrecy: The *New Haven Register* in Connecticut disclosed that the Milford school district had signed a seven-year agreement with Coke—in return for \$133,000 in scholarship money and rights to advertise in the schools—more than a year before it was disclosed in January 2005. The newspaper quoted officials who contended the agreement had already netted \$45,000 for the district in its first year of operation and could yield “hundreds of thousands of dollars for school programs.”<sup>84</sup> The purported benefits did not mollify critics. “In effect, because of the secrecy surrounding this agreement, the

company was able to secure a captive corps of very young consumers, without their parents or the school board having any say in the matter,” a *Milford Mirror* editorial writer lamented.<sup>85</sup> In Pennsylvania, one proposed bill would have limited a school board’s authority to sign exclusive contracts with soda and junk-food vendors and required public hearings on exclusive food and beverage agreements.<sup>86</sup>

Concerns over student health and nutrition dominate the debate over vending contracts and other forms of school commercialism as well. “Why do we have to get in bed with a soda company now, when now is the best time to get out of it?” a parent, Larry Pace, asked about the Orange County deal.<sup>87</sup> Contract critics such as Mr. Pace most often appear to focus on the negative health effects of soft drinks. Similar concerns have greeted some incentive programs that use food—especially high-fat or high-sugar food—as a reward. “It undermines everything we teach them about eating right,” Linda Nye, a registered dietitian, told the *Wichita Eagle* about incentive programs such as Pizza Hut’s “Book it!”<sup>88</sup> In Florida, Palm Beach County School Board members expressed reservations about a promotion by Krispy Kreme doughnuts awarding students a free doughnut for every “A” on their report cards. The company also gives posters of doughnuts to teachers; students who meet classroom goals decorate the posters with “success sprinkles”—and classes can then trade them in for doughnuts.<sup>89</sup>

Sometimes reaction to questionable arrangements is belated. The Hillsborough County, Florida, school board was apparently unaware of how much soda students were drinking as a consequence of its \$50 million, 12-year contract with Pepsi until the *Tampa Tribune* inquired, and found that water and juice consumption from the vending machines lagged far behind carbonated beverages. School board members admitted to the

newspaper that the body had ignored the advice of a school health advisory committee, which urged in a 138-page report in 2003 that the district examine vending machine sales as a way to address “the growing obesity epidemic.” The \$6.5 million schools had gained from the Pepsi contract may help explain why the advice was overlooked.<sup>90</sup>

### ***Comprehensive Approaches to Children’s Health***

In Denver, a school district commission charged with recommending ways to improve student health called for a variety of measures: adding gym time and hiking taxes to hire more gym teachers, but also restrictions on food and beverages sold on school campuses in favor of products lower in fat and sugar.<sup>91</sup> Local editorialists endorsed the recommendations: “Good parents don’t let children choose any diet they want, and neither should good schools,” one of them wrote in the *Rocky Mountain News*.<sup>92</sup>

In another example of efforts to address children’s health more comprehensively, the Albuquerque Public Schools undertook beginning in early 2005 a research project in which 22 schools agreed to limit soda sales during the day and offer more healthful alternatives. Additionally, the project is attempting to track the impact of nutritional food and beverages on student behavior and academic performance, as well as on school revenues.<sup>93</sup>

### ***Regulation Increases***

The impact of government regulation is more powerful. In Texas, Agriculture commissioner Susan Combs issued regulations banning soda and candy from schools and setting strict limits on servings of potato chips and cookies.<sup>94</sup> State and local bans on

junk food and soft drinks in schools appear to be slowly spreading. Hawaii implemented a statewide requirement that only 20 percent of beverage vending machine slots could be sodas; the remaining 80 percent of slots was reserved for milk, water, fruit juice and other more healthful options.<sup>95</sup> Oklahoma legislators passed, and the state’s governor signed, legislation in the spring of 2005 that prohibits the sale of foods “low in nutritional value” in elementary, middle, and junior high schools, and requiring high schools to also offer healthy food choices with incentives such as reduced prices.<sup>96</sup> Seattle’s school board passed a blanket ban on sodas and foods with high fat and sugar levels.<sup>97</sup> Washington, D.C. school board members passed a similar ban, ordering schools to replace sodas with water, 50-percent or more fruit-juice drinks, and low-fat or fat-free milk.<sup>98</sup> In Sioux Falls, S.D., soda pop and junk foods were banned from sale from one hour before to one hour after school. Items for sale were restricted to those with less than 35 percent of calories from fat, less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat, and less than 35 percent sugar by weight. The ban left low-fat milk, fruit and vegetable juices, nuts, seeds, and sports drinks available for sale. While there was some resistance—one member of the public told the board in an e-mail message that schools “can’t ‘think’ for all of these children,” and another suggested that it was “just nicer and more convenient to have a store at school with pop and snacks, with the choice of a healthy or non-healthy snack”—school board member Joy Smolnisky supported the ban and framed the move as ending the exploitation of children through unhealthy foods: “We won’t be making money on that, and we won’t be the supplier.”<sup>99</sup>

## *Do Bans Hurt Schools?*

There is contradictory anecdotal evidence about the financial impact of such bans. A high school principal, Tom Lee, in Des Moines, IA, complained that just removing five vending machines because of a construction project was costing his school “close to \$2,000 a month in revenue” that would otherwise go to cover field trips, transportation costs, and other expenses.<sup>100</sup> In Pender County, N.C., where schools removed or curtailed the use of vending machines after state officials found violations of state and federal regulations, a school principal complained that the new, tougher stance “jeopardized part of my financial being” because vending was used to fund costs as varied as athletics, computer repairs, and student competitions.<sup>101</sup> A teacher at Monroe High School in Los Angeles told a public radio reporter that vending revenues had dropped to \$6,000 a month from \$18,000 after that school system banned soda and junk food.<sup>102</sup> Another account said some schools were losing \$1,000 or more weekly, and that schools in the San Fernando Valley collectively lost \$301,820 in beverage revenue over three months in 2004.<sup>103</sup> A trade publication reported a 60 percent loss of revenue to Los Angeles public secondary schools.<sup>104</sup> In June 2005, the LA district announced an agreement for a \$26 million, five-year contract with Pepsi, with vending choices limited to juice, water, and Gatorade.<sup>105</sup> Another published report, however, found that, while the loss of unhealthy products may have cost some schools, others seem to be gaining sales from the introduction of more healthful products. Definitive numbers were not provided, however.<sup>106</sup> Yet at least one examination of vending policies, conducted by Community Health Partnership, a Portland, OR, group critical of soft drink sales agreements, found that schools’ commissions were higher for sodas—50 percent for 20-

ounce sodas, 35 percent for 12 ounce sodas, compared with 30 percent for juice.<sup>107</sup> The commission structure may add to the incentives schools have to sell harmful products and explain the initial loss of revenue when more healthful beverages replace soft drinks.

By contrast, eight Arizona schools that took part in a five-month study that measured the effects of substituting healthful snacks for unhealthy ones found “no negative financial impacts” overall.<sup>108</sup> Schools participating in the study substituted granola bars and peanuts for candy bars and other junk foods, and water for soft drinks.

### ***Corporate Solutions: “Choices” and “Education”***

Defenders of soda-company contracts frequently attempt to rebut criticism by calling for “education” on making “healthy choices.” In Manatee County, FL, the countywide school district’s board approved a \$7.5 million, 10-year contract offering Coke exclusive selling rights in the district, and also agreed to hire a nutritionist to develop curriculum and otherwise “foster better eating habits in the schools.”<sup>109</sup> The new employee may have an especially difficult challenge: One Manatee High senior told a reporter she drinks two sodas in the morning, and others indicated that vending machine soft drinks “offer a tasty alternative to less flavorful beverages served in the school cafeteria.”<sup>110</sup> Another example is found in Pennsylvania, where Palisades High School Principal Richard Heffernan and some school board members spoke against a proposal to remove soda from vending machines. Noting that water, the sports drink PowerAde, and Coke were “the top three sellers” at the school, Heffernan said high school students “like to be treated as young adults, and can make decisions.”<sup>111</sup>

Getting rid of soda and junk food does not necessarily mean getting rid of exclusive contracts. Chicago Public Schools, for example, opted not to renew a five-year contract with Coke in November 2004, but replaced it with a pact with American Bottling Co. to stock school vending machines with fruit juices, water, and sports drinks.<sup>112</sup> Indeed there is ample evidence of a sort of “don’t beat ’em—join ’em” trend in school vending. Some schools and soft drink vendors are trying to maintain their relationships while easing pressure from critics, supplementing or replacing soft drinks with products purported to be more healthful. The Easton Area School District in Pennsylvania, which pitted Coke and Pepsi against each other in pursuit of a 10-year contract worth about \$1.1 million to the district, included fruit drinks and sports drinks in the agreement.<sup>113</sup> Stambaugh Middle School in Auburndale, FL, banned all carbonated drinks from campus vending machines in January 2005. The school still has an exclusive agreement with Coca-Cola, but limits beverages to water, juices, and sports drinks.<sup>114</sup> In another instance, a new federal regulation, according to one trade-publication account, will permit schools to sell milk in vending machines and at sporting events regardless of what exclusive soft-drink contracts say.<sup>115</sup> In Wisconsin, the Mercer School’s board approved an agreement with the sandwich purveyor Subway to provide “more healthy food choices” in the form of a la carte lunches.<sup>116</sup> On the supply side, meanwhile, Switch Beverage Co., a maker of carbonated fruit-juice drinks based in Richmond, VA, indicated plans to push its products aggressively into the school market as a more healthful alternative to sodas. The company set a target of 1 million cases in sales by the end of 2006.<sup>117</sup> Coke has introduced Swerve, a flavored milk drink, in school vending machines, and Pepsi is testing a similar product, Quaker Milk Chillers, which are made

with 52 percent low-fat milk.<sup>118</sup> Stonyfield Farms, the No. 3 yogurt producer in the U.S., in 2003 instituted a marketing campaign to get its vending machines into schools as healthful alternatives to conventional snacks; the firm leases the machine for free for the first year in a school and stocks it with snacks that meet guidelines of no more than 35 percent of calories from fat, no more than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat, and no more than 35 percent sugar by weight.<sup>119</sup>

Yet another controversy, however, resulted from a deal between Atkins Nutritionals Inc. and several large educational organizations. Atkins Nutritionals, which promotes the low-carbohydrate diet theories of the late Dr. Robert Atkins and sells products that follow his precepts, has signed agreements with the National Association of State Boards of Education and the National Education Association to distribute Atkins-sponsored materials for “nutrition education.” The program includes a company-paid NEA website for teachers and students, in collaboration with school nurses in New York state, and a publication on childhood obesity directed at state education policy makers.<sup>120</sup>

The move prompted uproar from a *Los Angeles Times* editorial writer, who called the Atkins program “controversial” and noted that Atkins had long been criticized by nutritionists for limiting intake of certain fruits and vegetables while promoting the consumption of red meat. The editorial added: “...[P]ushing commercial diets with no proven long-term benefits onto captive schoolchildren is not the kind of public-private partnership that anyone should be happy to see.”<sup>121</sup>

Perhaps as a bellwether of the impact of public hostility to marketing activities that are seen to undermine children’s health, a television station in Bloomington, California awarded \$25,000 to Bloomington High School and 10 students who together



lost 95 pounds through diet, exercise, or both. The students got \$250 each, and the school got the balance of the prize to fund a shade shelter outside its cafeteria.<sup>122</sup>

### ***Businesses and Schools React to Bans***

Some vendors may be evading bans—and also some school districts. In Hernando County, FL, which banned soda in 2003 and restricted its agreement with Coke to water, sports drinks, fruit juices and milk, some soda-dispensing machines were outfitted with timers so as to shut off during school hours and turn on before or after school. A school official criticized the company's action as a violation of the school board's intent. Moreover, there were scattered instances of machines operating during school hours.<sup>123</sup>

But the divided loyalties of school administrators between children's health and the desire for revenues lead schools, too, to look for ways around the laws. In August 2004, the Irving Independent School District in Texas considered in taking over food vending machines to preserve the profits from chips, cupcakes, and candy, circumventing restrictions on those products: a loophole in the regulation restricting private vendors from selling those products during the most profitable period—lunch time—would have permitted the district to sell them.<sup>124</sup> Ultimately, however, the district considered the startup costs too high to justify the switch.<sup>125</sup>

### ***International Trends***

While not counted as a distinct category of commercializing activity, references to schoolhouse commercialism that appear in publications from outside the United States have been tracked separately over the life of the Trends Report. In the 2004-2005 study

period, international citations were up markedly. Review of the citations indicates that, as in some states of the U.S., government health and education agencies in other countries are beginning to examine the impact of commercialism, especially in light of its effects on children's health. For example, Britain's Food Standards Agency issued a report in October 2004 warning, in the words of one newspaper account, that "Britain's schoolchildren are being 'poisoned' by the fatty processed food in their packed lunches."<sup>126</sup>

Controversy over schoolhouse commercialism is worldwide. Consider, for example, the writer of a letter to the editor at a newspaper complaining about advertising in school workbooks—which appeared in the *New Straits Times* of Malaysia.<sup>127</sup> In France, a comprehensive new public health law passed in 2004 included a ban on candy and soda from vending machines in schools.<sup>128</sup> In New Zealand, local health authorities urged schools to discontinue the sales of candy bars in fundraising programs.<sup>129</sup> In British Columbia, Canada, a newspaper account on schoolhouse commercialism trends generally asked rhetorically whether a local elementary school was "a public school or a big-box store."<sup>130</sup>

In Canada, a variety of measures at the provincial level appeared poised to rein in the availability of sodas and junk foods from school vending machines. Such bans were undertaken in Alberta<sup>131</sup> and urged in Ontario,<sup>132</sup> among other places. At the same time, however, there were countervailing instances of relaxed regulation, as when Nova Scotia gave school principals the authority to sell advertising space in the buildings under their supervision.<sup>133</sup>

## Conclusion

Educators continue to express mixed feelings about corporate involvement in schools. Asked about the prospect of corporate sponsorship of school athletic teams, complete with brand logos on uniforms, the head of the Ohio High School Athletic Association told the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*: “I hope that never happens.” Yet the official, Dan Ross, acknowledged that “as the financing gets tougher ... you could have ‘presented by’ or ‘sponsored by.’ I hope it doesn’t cross the commercial line too far.”<sup>134</sup> At the same time, though, a high school principal elected president of the Florida High School Athletic Association reported that one of his goals upon taking office to land *more* corporate sponsorships in order to cut membership dues for participating schools.<sup>135</sup>

In late 2004 the book *Born to Buy* by economist Juliet Schor was published to critical acclaim. In the book, Schor pointed out the problem with all such marketing-cum-curriculum, and analyzed a Kellogg cereal nutritional curriculum that focused on fat as a breakfast food concern, ignoring sugar and salt. She also observed that *Scholastic* magazine gives over its pages to corporate advertisers who sponsor special issues.<sup>136</sup> While certainly not the first to examine the phenomenon, Schor’s book touched off a number of articles and appeared to have the effect of raising awareness in the popular press on the issues and the phenomenon. The same cannot be said of the education press, which once again covered schoolhouse commercialism only sparingly.

Commercial interests show few serious signs of pulling back. Quite the opposite: Praising a video game company’s partnership with Channel One, an industry publication wrote that “marketing into high schools is a tough and sensitive area that Primedia’s Channel One figured out long ago. There are in fact *a number of untapped points of entry*

*into the high school and middle school markets, including a number of sports pubs* [publications] that schools allow through their well-guarded marketing filters” (emphasis added).<sup>137</sup> The choice is increasingly stark for school leaders, who will have to decide whether their jobs entail providing an education to their students or offering them up as “untapped points of entry” to marketers.

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## **APPENDIX A: Methodology**

CERU combined two different methods to collect and tabulate media citations for the 2005 Trends Report. The first method yields a census count of all articles. From July 2004 to March 2005 CERU researchers collected and counted all relevant citations for each month to derive the census count of articles that appeared during this nine month period. The census method is identical to that used in previous Trends reports and provides the total number of references to commercialism in schools. The second method is based on a sampling protocol and yields an estimate of the number of articles appearing in each month. From April 2005 to June 2005, CERU researchers reviewed all articles that appeared during a select week of the month. The selected week was drawn at random. The randomization method provides that for each month, every full week (seven consecutive days) was given an equal and independent chance to be selected. Researchers collected, read and recorded articles that appeared only during the selected week. For instance, for June 2005, the selected week began on the first and ended on the seventh. Articles which appeared only during those seven days were collected from each press. For the Lexis Nexis databases, the search parameters were modified to include only the seven days in the selected week.

Once articles were identified and reviewed for relevancy, the estimated number of articles for each month was calculated by extrapolating from the number of sampled articles per month using a multiplier. The multiplier for each month equals the number of days in the month divided by seven. The multiplier is designed to simulate the proportion of the month that is represented by the sample week. For example, the multiplier for June is 4.286, or seven divided

by 30. The estimated number of articles for each month is the product of the number of articles sampled in the select week and the multiplier. For example in June, three articles related to Exclusive Agreements appeared in the popular press during the selected week. The estimated number of articles is calculated by multiplying the number of articles (3) collected in the select week by 4.286, yielding an estimate of 13 articles on Exclusive Agreements for June.

Throughout the report the number of citations for the months of April, May, and June are estimates based on the sampling and estimation procedures described above.

In cases where the annual total number of articles is presented in a table or graph, these annual estimates are derived by adding the census counts to an average of the sample estimates across the three months under study. The annual total number of articles calculated according to three different scenarios; low, mid and high. The mid estimate is the sum of the total number of articles collected using the census method and the mean estimated number of articles across the sampled months. The low estimate is the sum of the total number of articles collected using the census method and the lower bound of the 95 percent confidence interval of the mean estimated number of articles across the sampled months. The high estimate is calculated identical to the low estimate but using the upper bound 95 percent confidence interval of the mean estimated number of articles across the sampled months. Appendix B contains the mean and 95 percent confidence intervals for each unique press and category combination across the sampled months.

### ***Google News Press***

Many news sources are not included in the Education Index or Lexis Nexis databases. In order to retrieve articles from such sources, the search terms for each category and supplemental

search are imputed into the News Alerts function of the Google website. Google then provided daily email alerts containing articles with references to commercialism. Between July 2004 and March 2005 the census of Google News articles was collected and read for relevancy. From April 2005 to June 2005, researchers only collected and reviewed those articles sent via email during the randomly selected week for each month. The estimated number of articles for the month was derived using the multiplier as described in the previous section.

Articles retrieved and counted from the Lexis Nexis Popular Press searches that also were captured in the Google News searches were not counted a second time. Also, if the same article appeared in more than one edition of the same publication it was not counted again.

Articles were counted more than once in the following instances:

1. If a single article contained material relevant to more than one commercializing category, the article was counted in each relevant category or supplemental search.
2. If the same article was published by more than one outlet, the article was counted once for each separate outlet in which it appeared.

**APPENDIX B: Mean Number of Articles and the Lower and Upper Bound 95% Confidence Intervals by Category/Supplemental Search and Press**

<b>Category/ Supplemental Search</b>	<b>Press</b>	<b>Lower Bound</b>	<b>Projected Hits (Mean)</b>	<b>Upper Bound</b>	<b>Projected Hits (Standard Deviation)</b>
<b>Sponsorship of Programs</b>	Advertising	4	10	16	5
	Business	0	7	15	7
	Education	0	0	0	0
	Popular/ Google	79	158	237	70
<b>Children’s Health and Nutrition (supplemental search)</b>	Advertising	-1	12	24	11
	Business	-3	3	9	5
	Education	0	0	0	0
	Popular/ Google	44	113	183	62
<b>Exclusive Agreements</b>	Advertising	-3	3	8	5
	Business	-3	3	9	5
	Education	0	0	0	0
	Popular/ Google	34	43	52	8
<b>Incentive Programs</b>	Advertising	-1	1	4	2
	Business	-1	1	4	2
	Education	0	0	0	0
	Popular/ Google	4	9	14	5

<b>Category</b>	<b>Press</b>	<b>Lower Bound</b>	<b>Projected Hits (Mean)</b>	<b>Upper Bound</b>	<b>Projected Hits (Standard Deviation)</b>
<b>Appropriation of Space</b>	Advertising	-3	3	9	5
	Business	-1	1	4	3
	Education	0	0	0	0
	Popular/Google	8	22	35	12
<b>Supplementary Education Materials</b>	Advertising	-5	6	17	10
	Business	-4	4	13	7
	Education	0	0	0	0
	Popular/Google	-10	59	128	61
<b>Electronic Marketing</b>	Advertising	0	0	0	0
	Business	0	0	0	0
	Education	0	0	0	0
	Popular/Google	7	17	28	9
<b>Privatization</b>	Advertising	-1	4	9	4
	Business	0	0	0	0
	Education	0	0	0	0
	Popular/Google	15	37	60	20



Category	Press	Lower Bound	Projected Hits (Mean)	Upper Bound	Projected Hits (Standard Deviation)
<b>Fundraising</b>	Advertising	0	0	0	0
	Business	-1	1	4	3
	Education	0	0	0	0
	Popular/Google	0	17	35	15
<b>Commercialism (supplemental search)</b>	Advertising	-1	1	4	3
	Business	0	0	0	0
	Education	0	0	0	0
	Popular/Google	-1	19	39	18