



CERU | Commercialism in Education Research Unit

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MOST PUBLIC SCHOOL CHILDREN EXPOSED TO ‘JUNK FOOD’ ADVERTISING IN THEIR SCHOOLS, STUDY SAYS

CONTACT: Alex Molnar (480) 965-1886 (email) eps1@asu.edu

TEMPE, Ariz. (Monday, September 18, 2006) — Companies that sell so-called “junk food” are behind most of the commercial activity targeting children in schools, according to “A National Survey of the Types and Extent of the Marketing of Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value in Schools,” a study conducted by the Arizona State University Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU).

According to the National Institute of Medicine, the rate of childhood obesity has more than doubled over the past three decades. The CERU study is the result of the first nationwide survey to assess the nature and degree of marketing foods of minimal nutritional value and foods high in fat and sugar in schools. Consumed in excess, these foods are unhealthy and could contribute to obesity.

A stratified random sample of U.S. district public primary, middle, and high schools were surveyed. The results generalize to all U.S. district public schools. Study authors estimate that between 26.6 million and 30.3 million students are exposed to advertising of foods of minimal nutritional value or foods high in fat and sugar in school.

Advertising in schools may take many forms. Examples include: sponsorship (of sports teams, clubs, scholarships, and the like), incentive programs (giving free goods or coupons for academic achievements), and the appropriation of space (displaying brands, logos or names on vending machines, scoreboards, sports fields, or in the form of corporate “naming rights” for school facilities). The survey found that 67 percent of schools with sponsored programs, 71 percent of schools with incentive programs, and 40 percent of schools with appropriation of space programs engage in these advertising activities with corporations that sell foods of minimal nutritional value or foods high in fat and sugar.

“Schools’ health and nutrition curricula teach children to limit the amount of ‘junk food’ they consume,” said Alex Molnar, Director of the Commercialism in Education Research Unit and lead author of the study. “When schools participate in advertising efforts, they are, in effect, encouraging over-consumption of such foods, and thus compromising their curriculum -- not to mention their students’ health.”

The study also found:

- Fifty-seven percent of schools report participating in at least one fundraising program sponsored by a corporation that sells foods of minimal nutritional value or foods high in fat and sugar, and 37 percent report participating in two or more such programs.
- Sixty-eight percent of schools that participate in advertising activities that are expected to generate income report receiving *no* income at all from these activities, and only 5 percent report receiving more than \$10,000. Moreover, 88 percent of all schools report that no programs or activities would be reduced if advertising by corporations that sell foods of minimal nutritional value or foods high in fat and sugar were prohibited.
- Sixty-one percent of school officials favor increased regulation of advertising, in general, in schools. Sixty-nine percent favor increased regulation of advertising in school by corporations that sell foods of minimal nutritional value or foods high in fat and sugar.

This research was made possible by funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Find this document on the web at:

http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps1/CERU/CERU_2006_Research_Writing.htm

CONTACT:

Alex Molnar, Professor and Director
Commercialism in Education Research Unit
(480) 965-1886
eps1@asu.edu

<http://schoolcommercialism.org>

The Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) conducts research, disseminates information, and helps facilitate a dialogue between the education community, policy makers, and the public at large about commercial activities in schools. CERU is the only national academic research center dedicated to schoolhouse commercialism.

Visit the CERU website at <http://schoolcommercialism.org/>