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**Horne: Schools Won't Miss Junk-Food  
Sales Study Builds Support for Ban Bill**

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Schools that made healthy changes to their snack bars and vending machines during a five-month state study saw "no negative financial impacts." The fear of losing money has been the main reason that school districts have resisted banning junk food and soft drinks.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne released the results of an eight-school study on Tuesday that tested a ban on soft drinks and junk food during the school day and threw his weight behind a bill that would halt the sale of junk food in public schools.

"If you sell it, they will buy it," Horne said. "If you sell unhealthy things, they will buy that. But if you sell healthy foods, then they will buy that."

Schools and districts make tens of thousands of dollars annually through contracts with soft-drink companies and candy sales. The money pays for field trips, school clubs and athletic events.

Horne's study comes as schools across the United States are under pressure to provide healthier snacks because of rising rates of childhood obesity.

School districts in Seattle, Los Angeles and New York City have banned soft-drink sales along with sales of other junk food over concerns about childhood obesity.

Horne hopes the study will pave the way for the passage of House Bill 2544, a measure introduced last week by Rep. Mark Anderson, R-Mesa, that would require schools to ban soft drinks and offer healthier food at snack bars and in vending machines during the school day.

The legislation would prohibit schools from renewing or making new contracts with vendors for foods of "minimal nutritional value" which include soft drinks, candy, chewing gum and licorice. Vending-machine companies oppose the bill, saying schools should make that decision.

Critics in both the vending and soft-drink industry find fault with the school nutrition study, saying it was too short to measure effects on student health.

Stephanie Rimmer, a lobbyist for the food and beverage industry, calls the study's findings "preliminary" and not a good basis for legislation.

Rimmer said some schools in the study may have seen a jump in revenue simply because they increased their snack offerings for students.

Horne said the study was an "apples to apples" comparison. Nine more schools will take part in another similar study, which will begin in the fall.

A principal whose school took part in the study called it a positive experience.

Monte Vista Elementary School in east Phoenix averaged about \$500 to \$1,000 a month in snack-bar sales before the study. The 900-student school substituted granola and peanuts for candy bars and offered water instead of sugary sports drinks.

Principal Kathi Frankel said the school made \$500 more in snack sales over the course of the study. She, like other school officials whose schools participated in the study, plan to continue offering healthy snacks.

Not all schools saw increases.

Stanfield Elementary School, which is west of Casa Grande, saw a dip in sales as did Catalina Magnet High School in Tucson. State Department of Education officials said that was because both schools had fewer vending machines available to students during the study. Stanfield shut vending machines off during mealtimes.

One school that took part in the study, Mountain Trail Middle School, saw its vending-machine sales bring in about the same amount, \$230 a month, as last year.

Snack-bar sales from August through December were \$12,576, which is about \$4,500 behind last year, said Principal Jim Lee. The state excluded the school's snack-bar sales in its final report because state officials said external factors impacted sales. The snack bar was closed for a few days in October and November due to vandalism. This was the only snack bar excluded from the report.

Lee said he supports the change to healthier offerings.

"If it accomplishes the goal of healthier kids, I'm all for it," he said.

Lee does believe some of the revenue dip is due to the different snack choices, but he believes revenues will return in the long run.

Mountain Trail, near Cave Creek and Deer Valley roads in Phoenix, stopped serving anything with sugar or lard as a first ingredient during the school day to its 900 students. Instead of lollipops and candy bars, the snack bar offers crackers, sunflower seeds and Corn Nuts.

While this sounds strict, the campus is not all granola and raisins. The guidelines are loose enough to allow Famous Amos chocolate chip cookies, Rice Krispies Treats and Mini Oreo cookies.

And candy and soft drinks haven't been banned. Students can still buy them after school in the snack bar, which is run by the parent-teacher group.

Mom Carrie Salevitz, who volunteers at the snack bar, has seen a big change in the kids' behavior this year.

Last year, "these kids were wild, and after they were out here 10 minutes, you would not believe the noise level," she said.

This year, students are more courteous and patient, she said. And her eighth-grade son, who last year could make a meal from the snack-bar offerings, now eats in the cafeteria, she said.

Snack bars like the one at Mountain Trail are common at Arizona middle and high schools.

As long as the food is served outside the cafeteria, it doesn't have to meet the federal requirements for fat and calories that school lunches must follow. The snack sales have continued despite a 2001 U.S. Department of Agriculture report that warned that snack foods compete with lunch and may contribute to the trend of unhealthy eating among kids.

Students have mixed opinions about changing school snack bars.

Eighth-grader A.J. Burkett, 14, who attends Mountain Trail, sometimes misses candy and thinks schools should be able to sell sugary sports drinks during lunch.

Carolina Gonzalez, 14, isn't concerned. Candy is still available in the snack bar after school, she said.

She went from eating candy bars and Skittles during lunch to munching on Corn Nuts and drinking bottled water.

"People started getting used to this," she said.

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