
Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

Empty Calories, Empty Promises

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For Immediate Release

Empty Calories, Empty Promises
Advocates Call New School Beverage Policy a PR Stunt

Calling the American Beverage Association's new school beverage policy a publicity stunt, advocates for children and public health urged legislators to continue their important efforts to rid the nation's schools of soft drinks. The ABA, the lobbying arm of Coke and Pepsi, has announced a new "policy" that it claims is "aimed at providing lower calorie and/or nutritious beverages to schools and limiting the availability of soft drinks in schools." But advocates say the move amounts to no more than a shameless public relations stunt designed to deflect mounting criticism against the group's members.

"It's ironic that ABA would choose to make this announcement at the National Conference of State Legislatures meeting, since its members lobby against any state bills to get sodas out of schools," said Michele Simon, director of the Center for Informed Food Choices. In just the past year alone, such bills in Connecticut, Arizona, Kentucky, and New Mexico were either killed or watered down thanks to lobbying by soft drink companies. "If the ABA and its members were serious about addressing childhood obesity, they'd pledge to immediately stop undermining the effort of local nutrition advocates."

There is no enforcement or oversight mechanism for the new voluntary policy. The ABA is a trade association that does not directly control the sale of soda in schools. Soda is sold in schools through local distributors controlled by the parent companies, mainly Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, and Cadbury Schweppes and these companies' guidelines - such as Coca-Cola's written policy to not sell sodas in elementary schools - are routinely violated.

"The soft drink industry has repeatedly demonstrated that it cannot be trusted," said Dr. Susan Linn, co-founder of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood and author of *Consuming Kids*. Dr. Linn noted that Coca-Cola claims it does not market to children under

twelve, yet there are Coke toys for children as young as two and Coke's product placement is ubiquitous on American Idol, a top-rated show for children 2-11 and added, "This is an industry that makes empty promises in order to keep targeting children with empty calories."

Moreover, soda companies have locked school districts into long-term binding contracts. "Many schools are stuck with soda contracts for as long as ten years and this new policy cannot change that. Children's health should not be exploited for public relations," said Simon.

The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood is a national coalition of health care professionals, educators, advocacy groups and concerned parents who counter the harmful effects of marketing to children through action, advocacy, education, research, and collaboration among organizations and individuals who care about children. CCFC supports the rights of children to grow up – and the rights of parents to raise them – without being undermined by rampant consumerism. For more information, please visit: www.commercialfreechildhood.org