

The Ninth Annual Report on Schoolhouse Commercialism Trends: 2005-2006

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Executive Summary

In 2006, commercial forces in the nation's schools beat a strategic retreat that, paradoxically, secured their standing. While the soft-drink industry reached a seemingly path-breaking agreement to step back from advertising and selling sugared soft drinks in schools – on the surface, an important victory for opponents of school commercialism – the overall legitimacy of marketing in schools remained largely unchallenged and showed little sign of abating. This was so even though over the past decade and a half commercialism has become increasingly controversial.

Over the course of 15 years of data collected by the Education Policy Research Laboratory, media references to schoolhouse commercialism have generally shown a steady increase in references to all of eight categories: **Sponsorship of Programs and Activities; Exclusive Agreements** (with product vendors such as soft-drink manufacturers); **Incentive Programs** (which link achievement of academic goals with the consumption of commercial products); **Appropriation of Space** (advertising in various forms on school property); **Sponsored Educational Materials** (such as lesson plans and curricula furnished by commercial interests and frequently promoting products or ideas in the interests of their sponsors); **Electronic Marketing; Privatization;** and **Fund-Raising** (in conjunction with commercial product marketing). References to all

eight categories totaled 6,505 in the period from July 1, 2005, through June 30, 2006.

Most references have been found in either the general press or presses specific to business, advertising and marketing. Meanwhile, the education press (searched through Education Full Text service), accounted for 1 percent of all references. In recent years, however, the Markets and Industry and Business/Finance News searches have shown a consistent and marked increase in every category, while the Popular Press searches have shown a parallel decrease. These numbers suggest that, to editors working in the business, advertising, and marketing sectors, the subject of schoolhouse commercialism is becoming one of intense interest.

Schoolhouse commercialism results from the volume and intensity of marketing in our society in general and increased focus on children and youth in particular. The hunt by schools for additional revenue also plays a role, as schools perceive a direct benefit from programs that provide them with funds or relieve them of certain expenses.

There is limited evidence that a shift in public consciousness about commercialism is reshaping the way it manifests itself, and commercial interests are responding accordingly, finding ways to reframe their activities in light of such controversy. The most remarked-upon trend in 2005-2006 was the expansion of local and state regulation to curtail the sale and marketing of so-called junk foods in schools, culminating in a voluntary agreement by the American Beverage Association and market leaders Coca-Cola and PepsiCo to ban sugared soft drink sales in schools. The agreement forestalled a threatened lawsuit by consumer groups against the industry. It did not, however, fundamentally challenge the overall legitimacy of marketing in schools.

The 2005-2006 Report on Trends in Schoolhouse Commercialism marks the last

one in which the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) relies on measuring media citations to assess schoolhouse commercial activities, because of inherent limitations in the methodology. Future Trends reports will move away from the reporting of numbers of citations and toward a qualitative approach that seeks to analyze and critically interpret the findings that emerge, both through media accounts and through direct, primary source information on the topic.

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Introduction

The year 2006 is likely to be marked in the annals of school commercialism as the year the soft-drink industry agreed to step back from advertising and selling sugared soft drinks in schools. On its surface, this is a big change and a victory for opponents of school commercialism. Even as marketers agreed to forgo one source of revenue, however, the overall legitimacy of marketing in schools remains largely unchallenged. Schoolhouse commercialism overall showed little sign of abating in the 2005-2006 school year. Practices that use schools as marketing agents for products and corporate ideology continue to proliferate.

Over the past decade and a half commercialism has become increasingly controversial. For much of this period the most determined opposition to school commercialism has centered on corporate marketing of foods of little or no nutritional value. Opposition to the marketing and sale of junk food to children has in turn provoked an industry counter-reaction that disparagingly describes regulators who would limit unhealthful food and drink in schools as arms of the “nanny state,”¹ “food cops...pushing against our basic freedoms,”² or, in yet more inflammatory terms, “food Nazis.”³ Meanwhile, in the United States, the deeper question of how commercialism influences the intellectual and pedagogical mission of schools remains in large part unexamined in

any serious, continuing public-policy forum outside of the academy.

The Methods of This Report

Since its inception, the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) annual reports on trends in schoolhouse commercialism have relied on a proxy measure—media citations—to assess the type and impact of schoolhouse commercial activities. Since 1998, CERU trends reports have tallied school commercialism-related citations archived in the LexisNexis all-news, marketing and business databases, as well as in the Education Index. In addition, Google news alerts were created to locate popular press citations in media outlets not retrievable from LexisNexis to compile data for the annual report. Using search terms unique to each of the 7 to 10 categories of 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 methods.)

This method has proved useful as a means of quantifying the growth of schoolhouse commercialism. It is important to recognize, however, that the quantitative findings that emerge from these reports are only proxy numbers—reflecting the reality of commercial trends in much the same way as the candle-lit shadow play on the wall of a cave of Plato’s famous fable reflects the reality it is intended to depict. Measuring trends primarily by media references is subject to the inconsistencies of editorial decision-making that are inherent in the mass media. Paradoxically, the more pervasive a practice or phenomenon becomes in the modern, mass society, the less likely it is to surface, at least obviously, in the news media. For that reason, it is reasonable to expect that

especially very pervasive and commonplace commercial activities are likely over time to diminish in visibility in media reports.

A further limitation to the use of news media references to attempt to apply a quantitative measure to commercialism practices is that not all practices are treated uniformly by the news media. Practices that under official school district policy require school board action—the awarding of exclusive contracts to soft drink vendors, for instance, or the decision to permit or to bar advertising—will be easily monitored because of news media coverage of school board actions. Other practices, however, emerge only sporadically, such as the use of particular commercially sponsored curricula in classrooms. Decision-making over curriculum use, particularly curricula that may be supplied free of charge by a commercial entity and subtly (or blatantly) promoting the provider's commercial or ideological interests, tends to take place well out of sight of the daily press.

Consider, for example, Field Trip Factory, a business that offers schools free field trips, usually to stores, with the ostensible purpose of teaching lessons in subjects such as nutrition (grocery stores), animal care (pet stores), or health and fitness (sporting goods stores). Participating stores pay Field Trip Factory a fee for their inclusion in the program. Field Trip Factory emerged in the trends reports searches a few years ago, and it produced several citations in subsequent years.⁴ Yet, while the firm continues to operate,⁵ it did not appear in any of the Lexis-Nexis searches conducted for the 2005-2006 report.

The use of newspaper citations to accurately quantify trends over time is, to some degree, a self-limiting method not only because as marketing practices become more

pervasive they tend to attract less, not more, media attention, but also because, as search terms for categories of commercialism change to take into account new marketers and marketing practices any yearly change in the number of citations within a category tracked becomes more and more suspect. For these reasons, beginning with the 2007 trends report, we will move away from the reporting of numbers of citations and toward a qualitative approach that seeks to analyze and critically interpret the findings that emerge from individual media accounts of commercialism.

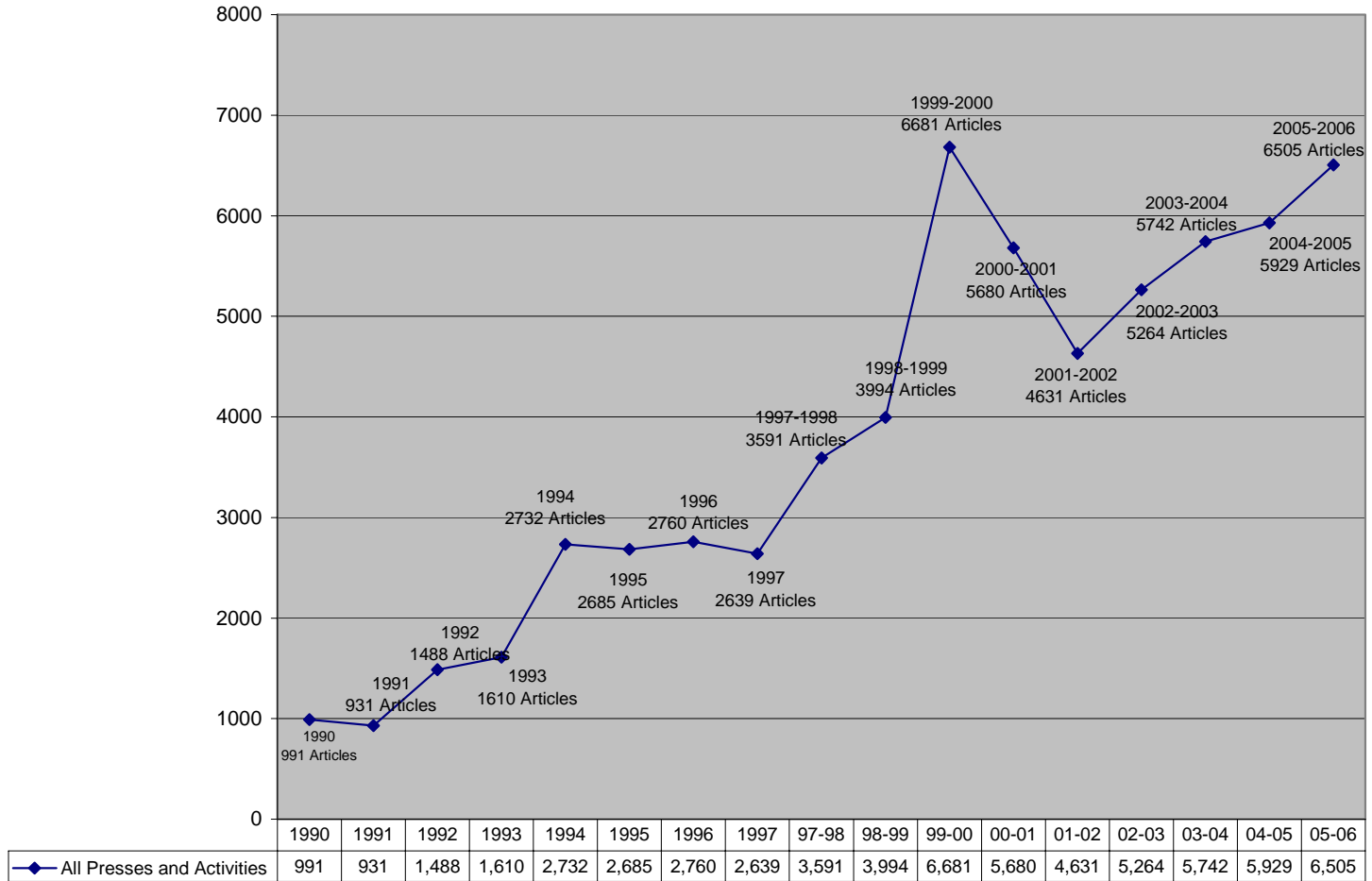
Thus, the 2005-2006 report reflects a methodological transition. It presents citations for 2005-2006 and summarizes all of the citation data presented since the first trends report was released in 1998. This year's report also contains a more extensive schoolhouse commercialism "industry report" discussion of what is common, what's unusual, and/or innovative, and assesses the various forces that promote and restrain it.

Fifteen Years of School Commercialism Data

Over the course of the last decade and a half, media references to schoolhouse commercialism have generally shown a steady increase. Counts of articles peaked in 1999-2000, and after a two-year decline, began increasing again in 2002-2003 (Figure 1).

Figure 1

**COMBINED TOTAL CITATIONS
BY COMMERCIALIZING ACTIVITY
1990-2006**



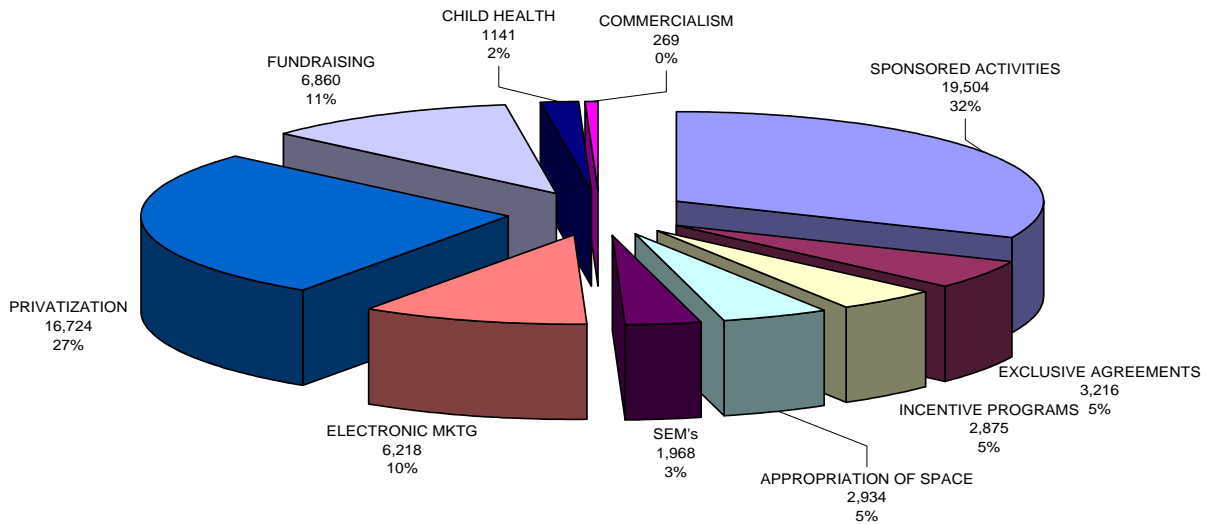
Commercialism Trends by Category

Since the first trends report in 1990, references to schoolhouse commercialism have been divided into a series of categories: originally 7, subsequently 8, and more recently, 10. Often, however, commercial practices and projects overlap several categories.

As reflected in Figure 2, below, media attention to various forms of commercialism varies widely by category. Category 1, “Sponsored Activities and Programs,” has consistently had the most commonly found citations while Category 5, “Sponsored Educational Materials,” has had the fewest.⁶

Figure 2

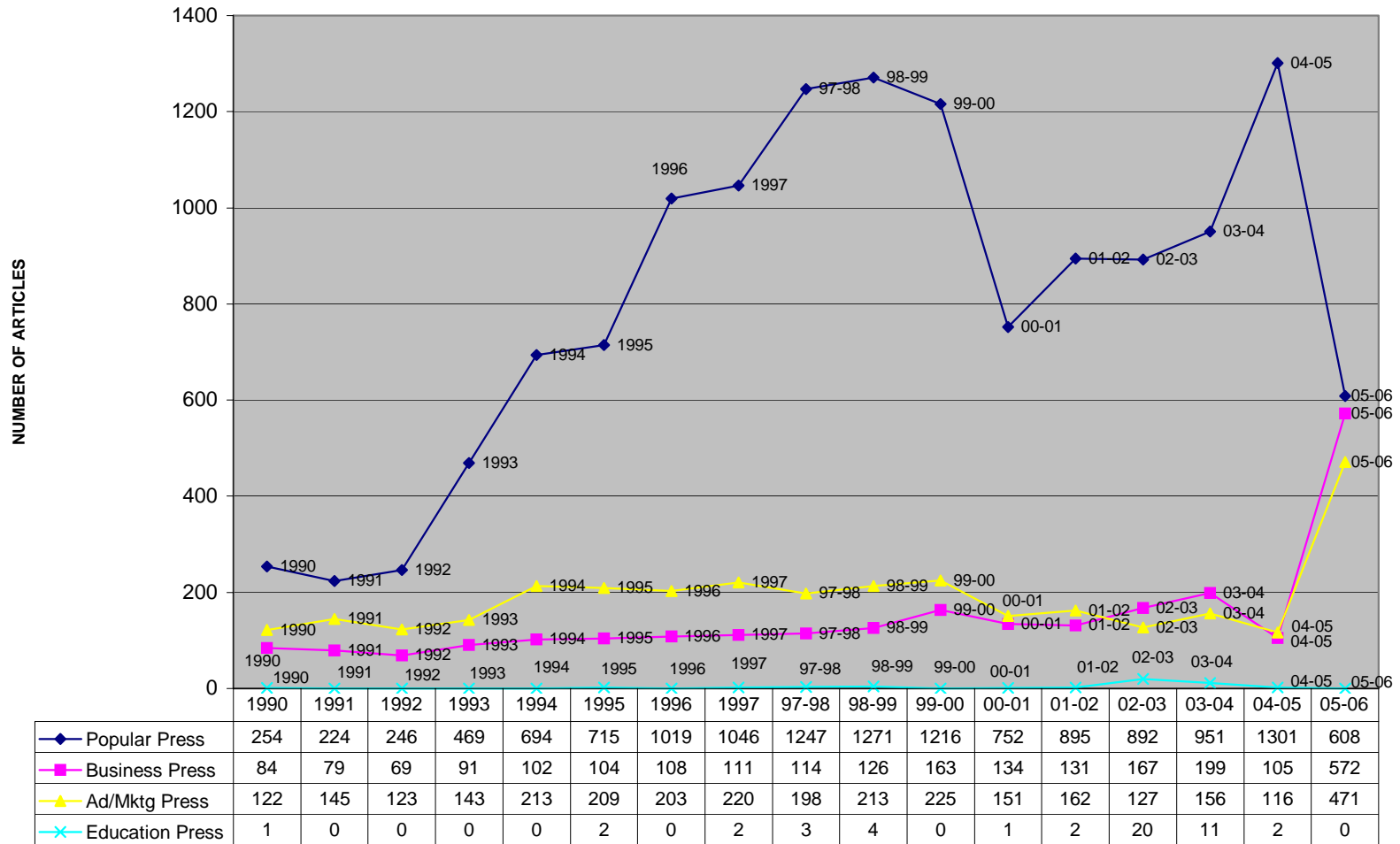
**COMBINED TOTAL HITS
EIGHT CATEGORIES OF COMMERCIALIZATION
FOUR PRESSES, 1990-2006**



The categories are defined as follows:

- 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 various kinds of academic contests, scholarships, or support for particular school programs.

Figure 3
SPONSORSHIP



Sponsorship is typically framed in terms of community goodwill and beneficence. Perhaps, however, sponsors also help create favorable public perceptions. Residents of Lacey's Spring, AL, who opposed a new rock quarry in their community, found that the quarry's owners, Rogers Group Inc. of Nashville, TN, had already secured community backing by agreeing to be a corporate sponsor for a local public elementary school.⁷

Probably the most widespread of scholarship programs is the National Merit Scholarships, many of which carry the names of their corporate sponsors.⁸ Corporate-specific scholarship programs benefit corporate donors in a variety of ways. For some, such as the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, recognizing youth volunteers⁹ may simply help donors amass general public goodwill. Others openly serve the commercial or business needs of a corporation or industry. In Philadelphia, for instance, auto dealers and tool manufacturers teamed with vocational high schools to award nearly \$1 million in scholarships and prizes for high school seniors in hopes of encouraging enrollment in auto-repair training schools, hoping to draw more students into the field and alleviate a chronic labor shortage.¹⁰ Scholarship programs from Coca-Cola¹¹ and Wendy's¹² can be seen both as philanthropy and as marketing; the latter is aimed directly at a demographic group sought by the companies. Still other scholarship programs yoke a brand name to a broader public policy discussion. For example, Toyota awards 15 scholarships of \$5,000 (Canadian) to Canadian students "who have demonstrated excellence in environmental community service"¹³—a subject that can be expected to serve the commercial and public policy interests of an automobile manufacturer in light of the industry's role in producing air pollution.

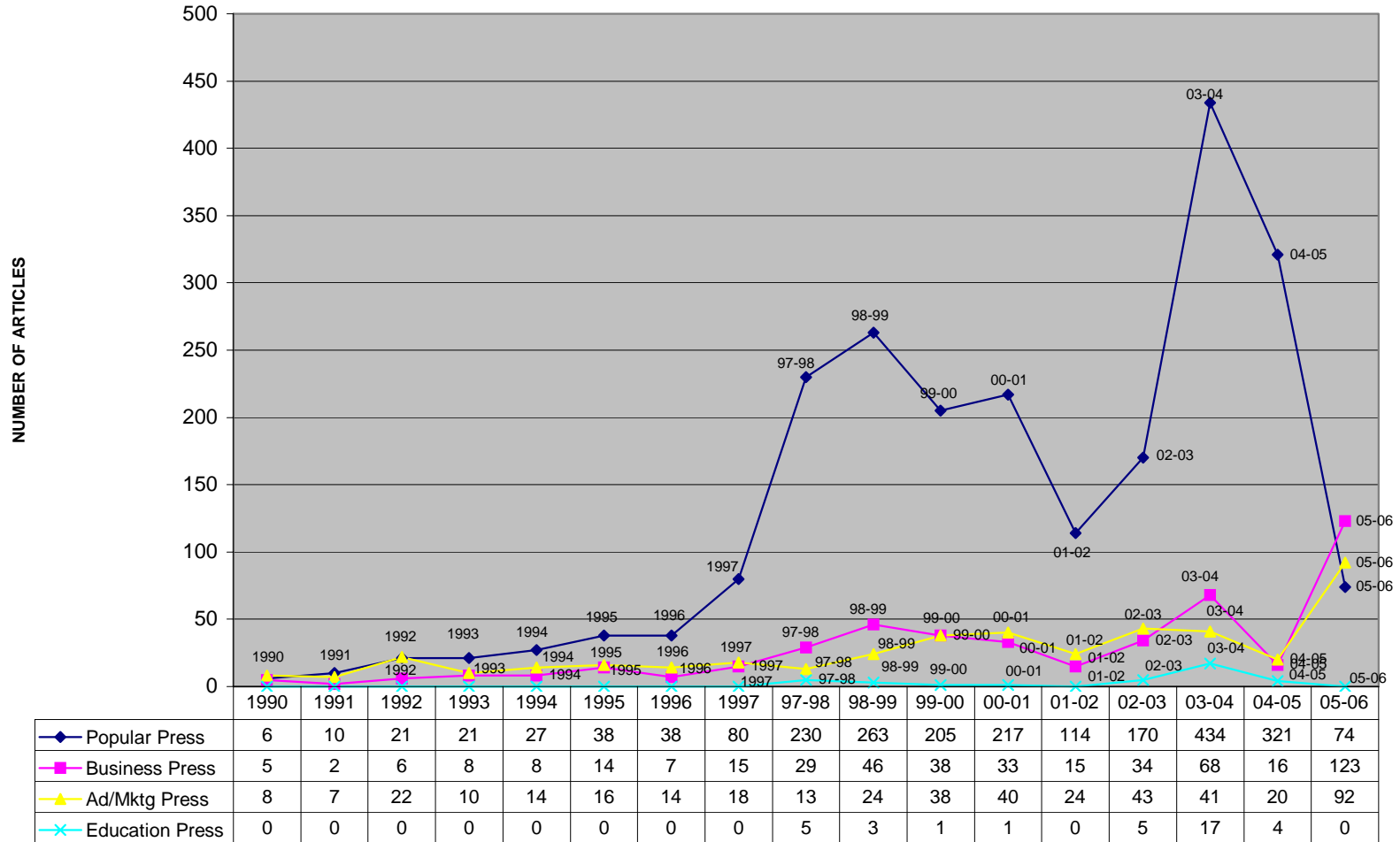
As with scholarship programs, corporate sponsorship of academic competitions

varies widely in nature and impact. In some, such as the National Science Bowl, corporate sponsors are acknowledged, but non-commercial entities play the lead role in undertaking the program.¹⁴ Elsewhere, though, pedagogical and commercial motives intersect. One example is the American Automobile Association's national competition, the AAA Travel High School Challenge. The challenge brings together teenagers from around the country in team and individual competition to answer questions about world geography and travel. It includes among its sponsors not only the automobile club but also airlines, hotels, a credit card company, and a chain nightclub. In a press release, AAA says that the contest "was developed to build high school students' travel knowledge and geographic literacy, while creating awareness of career opportunities in the travel and tourism industry."¹⁵

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.

Figure 4

EXCLUSIVE AGREEMENTS

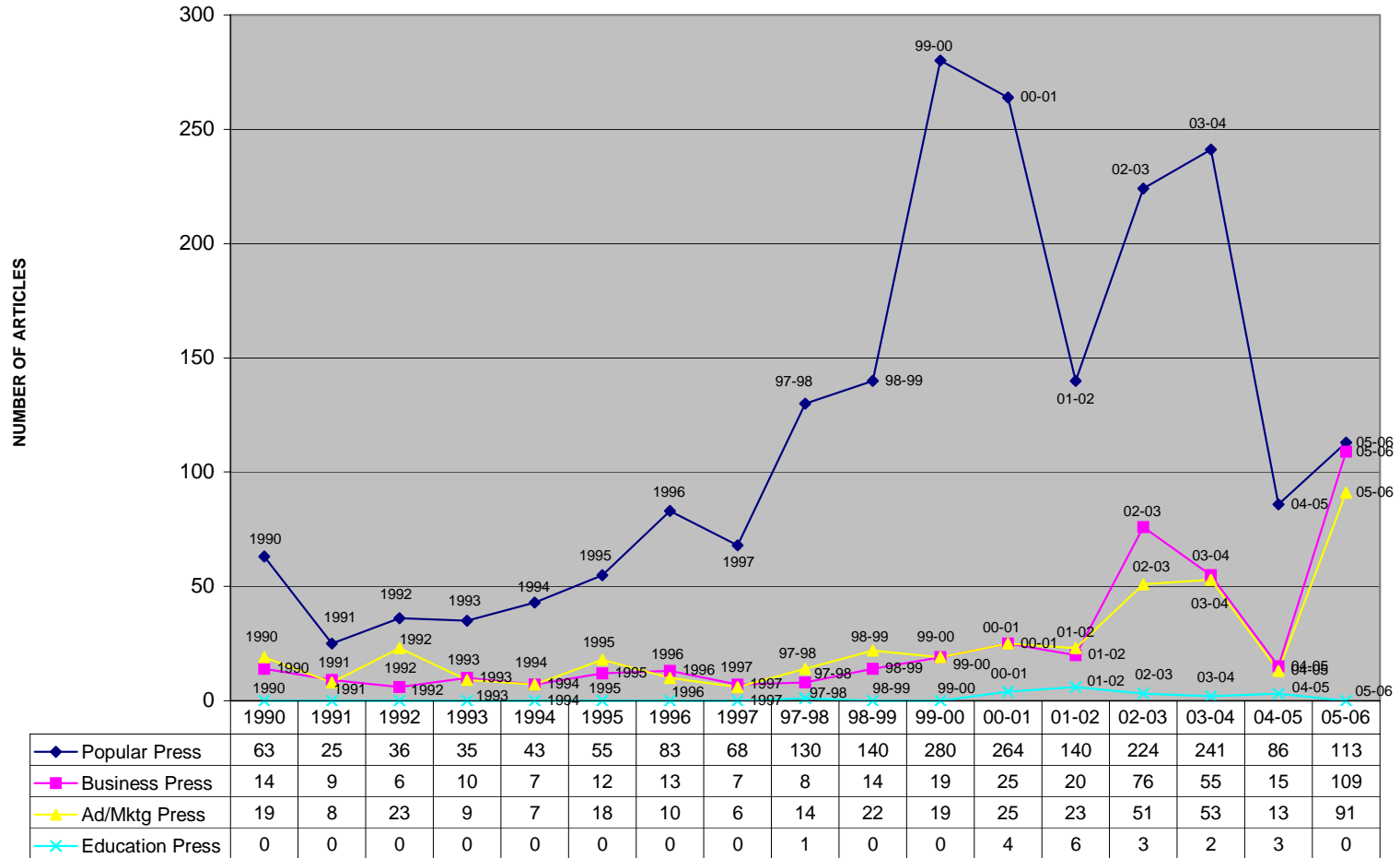


The nature of news articles that surface in this category has changed remarkably over the years. Trends reports in the late 1990s found many stories that were routine accounts of school board meetings, usually in smaller communities, in which contracts between districts and soft drink bottlers were approved.¹⁶ Over time an increasing number of articles have examined controversies generated by such agreements.¹⁷ Still later the focus shifted again, to regulatory and legislative efforts to limit or bar the marketing, sale, or distribution of soft drinks and other foods of minimal nutritional value—so-called junk food—in schools.¹⁸ This topic has come to dominate the category, as federal, state, and local authorities all have acted to restrain soft-drink and junk-food sales in schools. At the same time, the number of news articles reporting the routine signing of contracts with soft-drink makers and other providers has dropped sharply.¹⁹ This is unsurprising given the industry-wide agreement to limit the products sold in schools.²⁰

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—usually in return for achieving certain academic goals. (Early editions of this report also included shopper loyalty programs; these programs made financial awards to schools based on customer purchases. Subsequently, however, those were re-categorized as fund-raising programs so as to more clearly identify “incentive” programs with academic rewards.)

Figure 5

INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

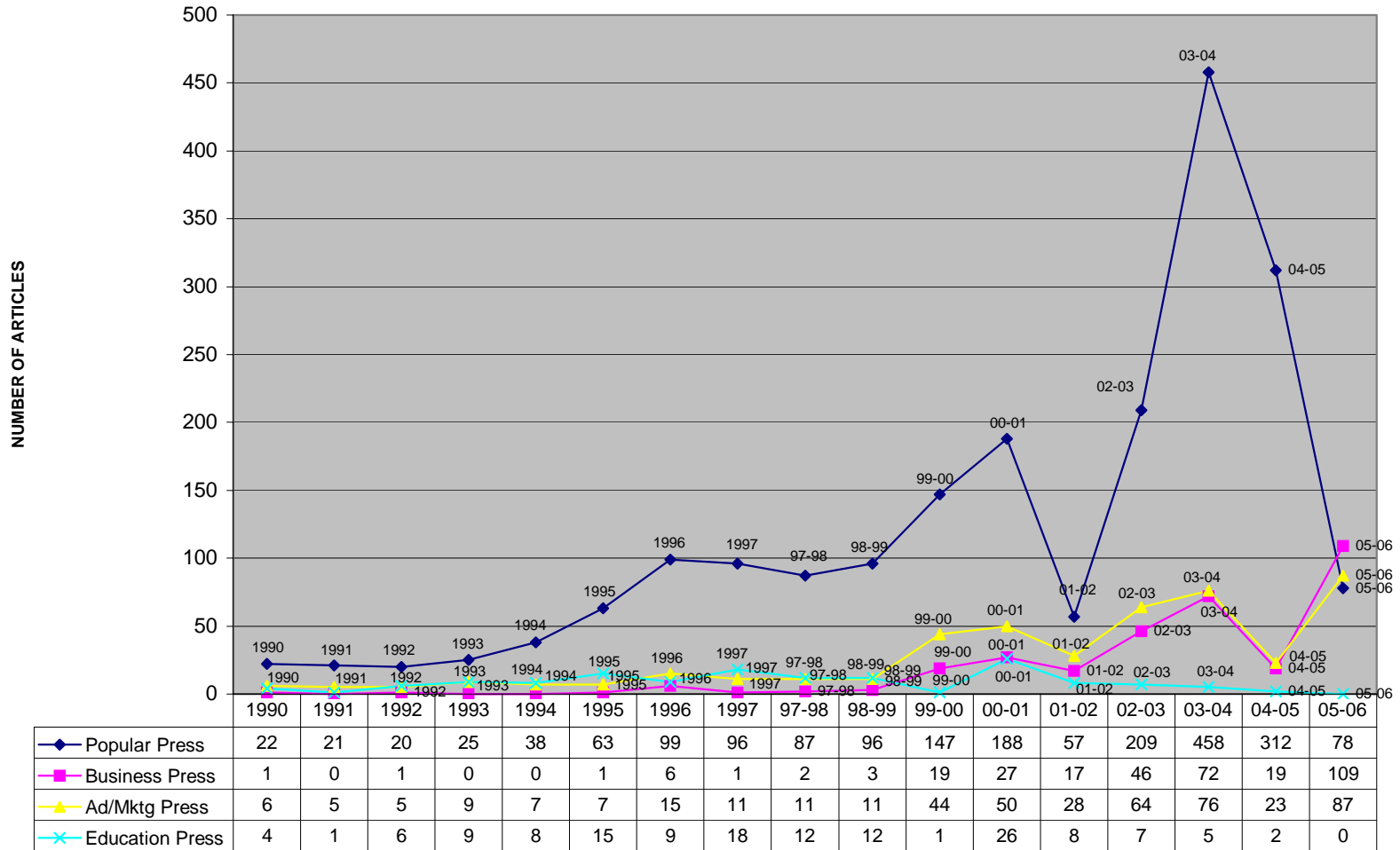


Pizza Hut's "Book-It" program, which rewards students with coupons for the company's products for accomplishing certain reading goals, remains the most visible example of this category.²¹ Others abound, however: a reading program promoting professional "wrestling";²² professional sports tickets for taking part in an after-school tutoring program.²³ The use of commercial product give-aways to boost school attendance is reported to be particularly common.²⁴ How effective attendance-based incentives are is not clear, however. In Chicago, where school officials said that every 1-percentage-point increase in attendance resulted in an additional \$18 million in state aid for the Chicago Public Schools, the school's perfect-attendance prizes in 2005-2006 ranged from Nike shoes to a chance to win a resort vacation. (Published reports did not specify if corporate sponsors provided these free or if the school district purchased them.)²⁵ Yet one finding regarding the same program calls into question the effectiveness of incentive programs in general. A Chicago incentive package that rewarded parents with grocery, rent, and mortgage payments as well as event tickets had no discernable impact over the fall of 2005.²⁶ While attendance did jump to 92.3 percent in January 2006 from 90 percent the previous January, officials acknowledged they were not sure whether the incentives or other circumstances, such as unseasonably mild weather, might have been the reason.²⁷ Such findings lead to the question of whether incentive programs really benefit schools and students, or, whether, instead, they primarily benefit their corporate sponsors.

- 4. Appropriation of Space:** The allocation of school space such as scoreboards, rooftops, bulletin boards, walls, and textbooks to corporate advertising messages; including the sale of naming rights for school property.

Figure 6

APPROPRIATION OF SPACE

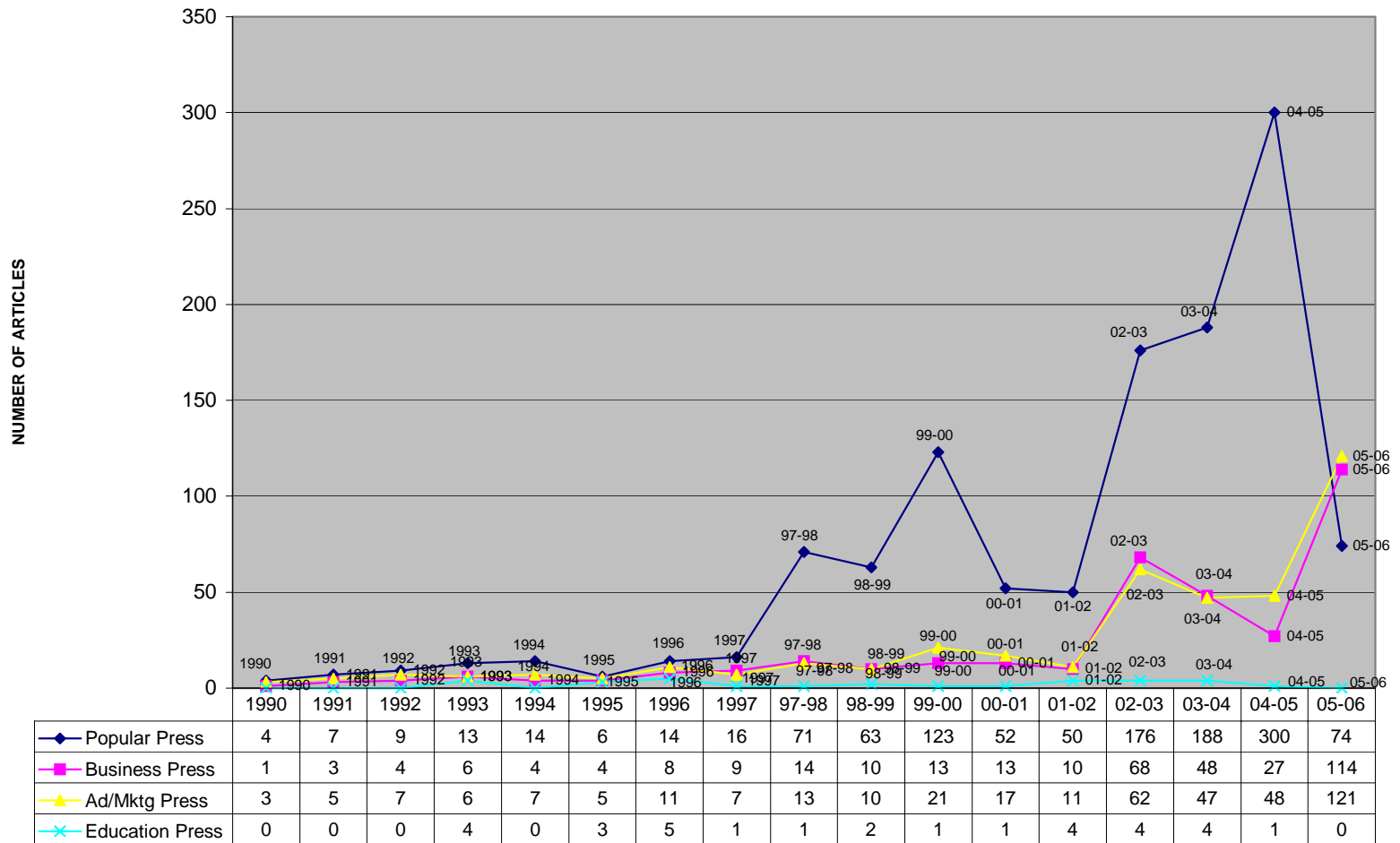


It is not entirely clear why this category experienced a sharp increase in 2003-2004 and then successive sharp declines in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006. Advertising contracts and the discussion of advertising policies were certainly in the news during the 2005-2006 year. For example, Ypsilanti Public Schools in Michigan approved in November 2005 a policy permitting the sale of advertisements on school buses—making it possibly the first district in the state to do so, according to published reports.²⁸ Shauli Zacks, a manager for the firm that contracted with the school district to sell ad space, Insight Media, told a reporter that pre-teens and teen-agers “are power spenders” who were expected to spend nationwide some \$51.8 billion over the course of a year.²⁹ “And for companies looking to build brand loyalty among kids, this is the perfect way to reach them.”³⁰ In Louisville, OH, plans for a new \$2.95 million school sports stadium were predicated on the expectation that it would be funded through scoreboard advertising, naming rights, and foundation grants.³¹ Denver Public Schools similarly expressed interest in making advertising space available on its new electronic scoreboards; the scoreboards themselves were provided by a corporate sponsor, Fox Sports Network Rocky Mountain, a cable television network.³² Additionally, the sale of naming rights to finance new facilities—a novelty only four years ago³³—has become increasingly commonplace.³⁴ Possible interpretations of the overall decline in references to this category are discussed later in this report.

- 5. Sponsored Educational Materials (SEMs):** Materials supplied by commercial interests, such as corporations or trade associations, who claim to have an instructional content.

Figure 7

SPONSORED EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS



As already observed, this type of marketing activity is likely to be considerably more pervasive than trends-report citations reveal. Some references to commercially—sponsored curricula emerge in press releases issued by corporations themselves or in coverage of marketing programs in the marketing and advertising press. Other references surface irregularly in feature articles. Examples of these sorts of programs vary considerably. For instance, Highmark Blue Shield, a health insurer in Pennsylvania, has passed out “Wellness Homework Planners” to elementary school students with “messages about health, nutrition, and physical activity.”³⁵ BizWorld Foundation, funded by a variety of corporate donors,³⁶ “provides curriculum to 3-8th grade teachers across the country...teaching entrepreneurship and business concepts in a real world context...”³⁷

With the release of its film version of the “The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe” in late 2005, The Walt Disney Co. sent 250,000 educational guides to the film and the original story by C.S. Lewis to schools, hoping to get the book added to middle-school curriculums. “If we could get everybody in America to read the book, they might be excited about the movie,” Disney Senior Vice President of Publicity Dennis Rice told the *Chicago Tribune*.³⁸ Firefly, to help sell a cell phone tailored for 8- to 12-year-olds to children and their parents, distributed a curriculum on “communications inventions” to 75,000 teachers in a joint venture with Scholastic, Inc.³⁹

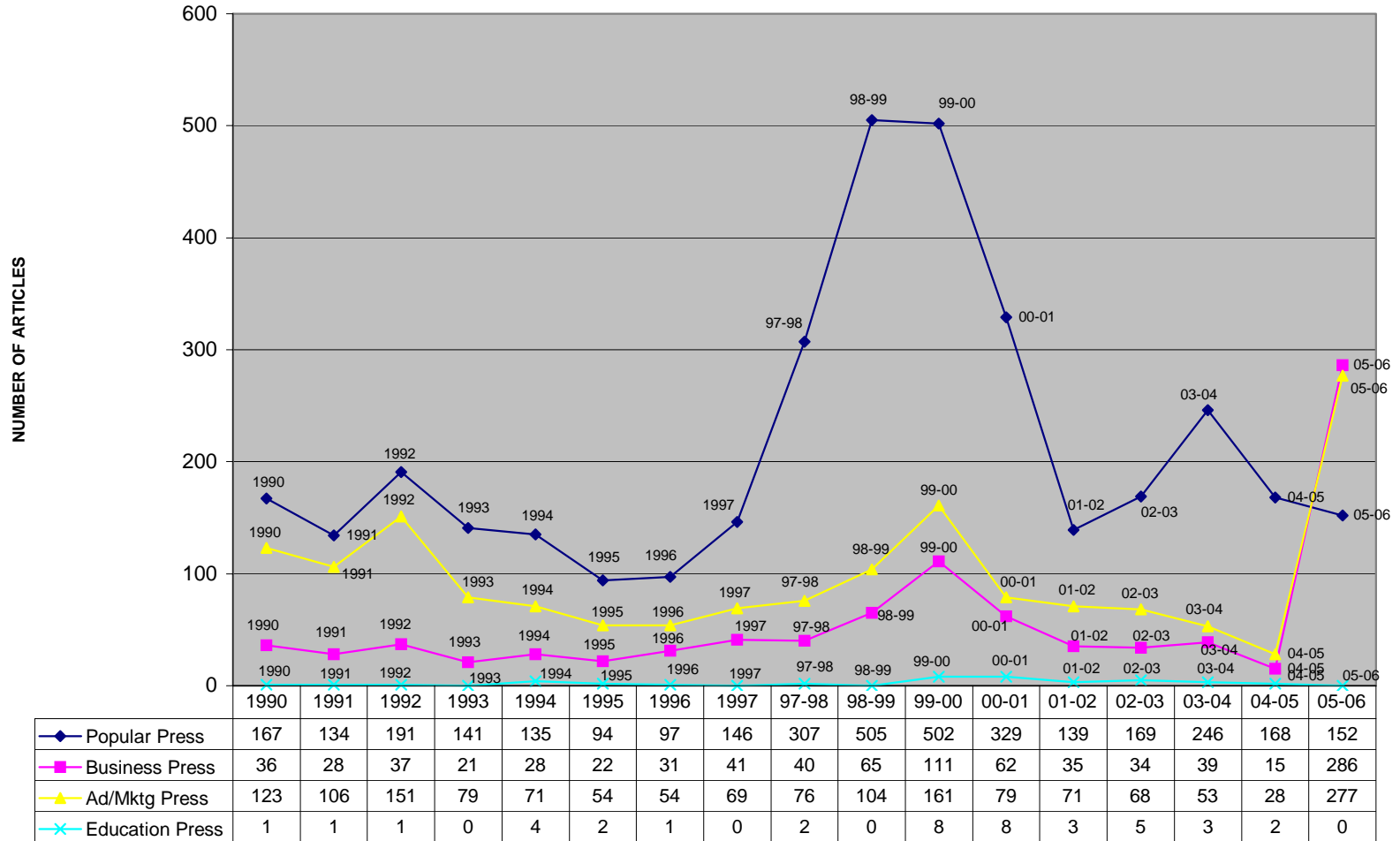
Video Placement Worldwide distributes company-sponsored videos to 150,000 teachers in, by its own count, more than 85 percent of US middle and high schools; the content of these “educational” videos include managing personal credit (by MasterCard), financial planning (by the Life and Health Insurance Foundation for Education), and the manufacturing operations of a candy company (by the Jelly Belly Candy Co).⁴⁰ In yet

another example, Chase Bank commissioned a financial-literacy curriculum for second and third grade students for distribution in the 2006-2007 school year.⁴¹ The curriculum is accompanied by a special piggy bank bearing the Chase logo. While a Chase spokeswoman described the program as “part of our philanthropy,” the chief executive of the National Council on Economic Education warned that such programs typically are “tied to ... marketing goals.”⁴²

- 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.

Figure 8

ELECTRONIC MARKETING



This category has long been dominated by Channel One, the Primedia-owned television service that provides television equipment to schools under the condition that teachers show a daily, mandatory 12-minute news program that includes two minutes of commercials.⁴³ The vast majority of references in CERU's 2005-2006 searches were in press releases distributed on behalf of Channel One itself; there were only a handful of independently generated news articles about the company.⁴⁴

The other primary example is the cable television industry's Cable in the Classroom (CIC) program, which provides commercial-free programming licensed for rebroadcasting in schools.⁴⁵ Although not directly advertising commercial products, the program's executive director, Helen Soule, says that it provides business benefits to the cable industry in the form of indirect marketing of its products and promoting the industry in a favorable light before community regulators (who presumably can influence the terms under which cable franchises are granted).⁴⁶ "Through CIC," Soule writes, "cable has not only helped teachers and students, it has also realized business and public affairs benefits as schools purchase advanced services, as parents sign up for broadband at home and as policy makers understand the full range of what this industry is doing in communities across the country."⁴⁷

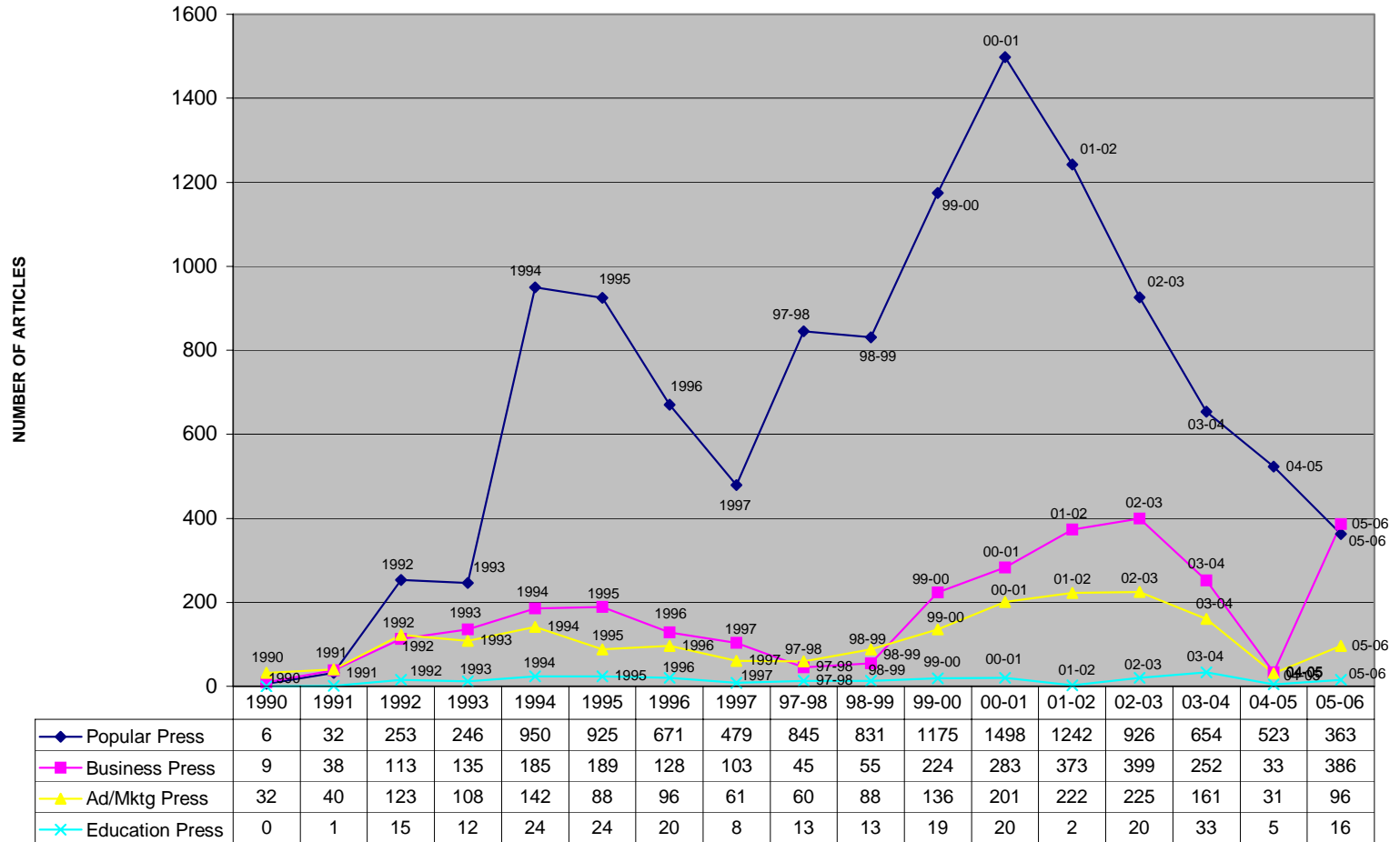
Only a handful of Internet references surfaced in 2005-2006, and most appeared to be only marginally relevant if at all. Others occurred in contexts that overlapped other categories, such as a financial education curriculum distributed by Citigroup and made available to teachers through free download on the Internet,⁴⁸ or an online book club with activities—as well as curriculum guides for teachers—provided by Scholastic Inc.⁴⁹ One exception is Hekko Corp., a San Diego, Calif., firm that provides "online learning

systems” for elementary schools and home users.⁵⁰ Hekko generated several press releases during the 2005-2006 period, mostly promoting its free web browser that parents can install on computers and block objectionable web sites or links from approved web sites. The firm also has created a loyalty program; parents who pay \$99 a year to enroll in Hekko also accumulate points for their children’s school, which the school can trade for computers, Hekko home memberships, and other rewards.⁵¹

7. Privatization: Management of schools or school programs by private, for-profit corporations or other non-public entities; primarily for-profit companies that contract to manage charter schools or district schools and that operate after-school tutoring programs and summer school programs.

Figure 9

PRIVATIZATION



Overall, references in this category have diminished considerably since a few years ago. The change can be attributed largely to one firm—Edison Schools—and two specific developments in Edison’s evolution. The first is Edison’s shift to a private company, which relieved it of the responsibility to file quarterly or annual statements with the Securities and Exchange Commission and of the financial press much of the scrutiny.⁵² The second likely reflects Edison’s no-longer-novel status in Philadelphia, where Edison signed contracts in 2002 to manage 20 schools.⁵³

Edison, however, is only one of a growing number of for-profit firms involved in managing schools, including the management of so-called virtual charter schools that enroll students who work at home and receive instruction and instructional materials through an Internet connection. References to most of these, however, were far fewer in number.

In addition to school-management and virtual-charter references, there were also references in 2005-2006 to supplemental educational services mandated under federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), such as private tutoring. NCLB requires schools or districts in which students have not achieved certain test-score benchmarks to make available, at school expense, private tutoring services for students whose parents request them. While the *New York Times* projected in 2005 that the requirement could generate as much as \$200 million in annual revenues for the private tutoring industry,⁵⁴ the newspaper subsequently found, in February 2006, that “vast numbers of students are not getting the tutoring that the law offers as one of its hallmarks.”⁵⁵

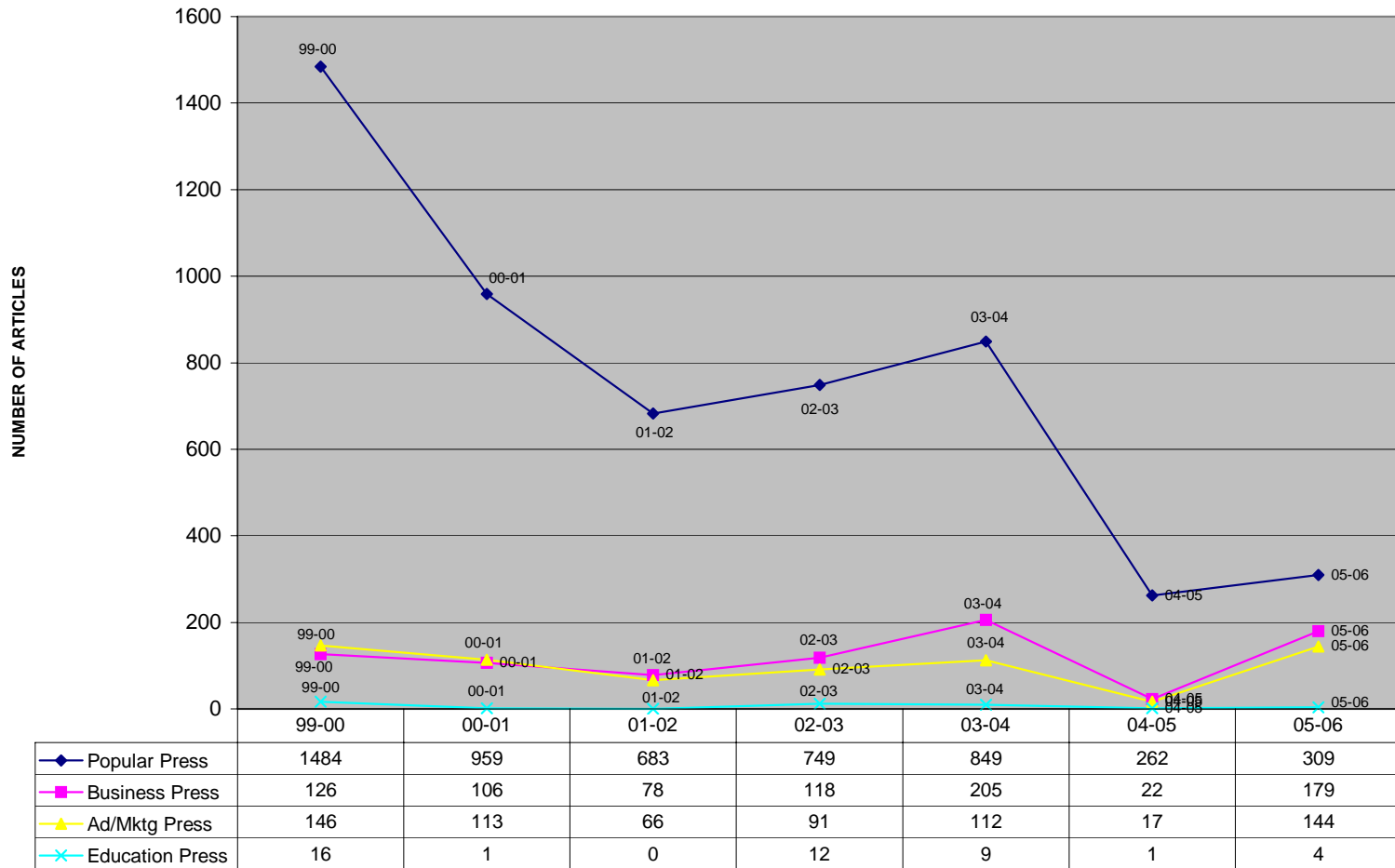
The tutoring firm most commonly identified in this report’s searches was Educate, Inc., owner of Sylvan Learning Centers. Educate, Inc., sold its NCLB tutoring service,

Education Station, to Knowledge Learning of Portland, OR, for \$6 million⁵⁶ after announcing plans to do so in October 2005.⁵⁷ The sale of Education Station, which lost \$1.6 million in sales on \$8 million in revenue in the 2006 second quarter, did not take Educate, Inc. out of the taxpayer-supported tutoring business, however, because the firm also provides NCLB tutoring online at its Sylvan Learning Center outlets.⁵⁸ A small number of other references to tutoring consisted mainly of news reports examining the effectiveness of such firms under the NCLB requirement.⁵⁹

- 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. (This category was added in 1999-2000.)

Figure 10

FUNDRAISING



References to fundraising fall into several broad groupings. First, there are routine reminders, often in “community bulletin board” sections of newspapers, urging readers and parents to participate in commercial fundraising programs such as General Mills’ Box Tops for Education. Second, there are longer feature stories describing specific school amenities or projects that were accomplished from funds provided through such programs. Third, there are analytical articles that describe trends or debates in school fundraising generally.

Two additional categories were created for the 2004-2005 report.

9. Child Health: The Child Health category recovers 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—turned up frequently across a wide spectrum of searches. In addition, many articles clearly took up school-related child health and general school commercialism issues without clearly fitting neatly any of the existing categories. Nevertheless, although searches were conducted in this category in 2004-2005, it was eliminated in 2005-2006 because it was too ill defined to yield useful quantitative

information.

- 10. Commercialism:** Created in 2004-2005 the Commercialism category was an effort to recover articles that address commercialism in schools but that did not qualify for the more specific categories of the report. This category included, but was not limited to, articles that refer to legislation regulating commercialism in schools and scholarly articles on the subject collected from the Education Press. The category was not continued in 2005-2006 because it was too ill defined to yield useful quantifiable information.

Forces that Drive Schoolhouse Commercialism

Schoolhouse commercialism results from the volume and intensity of marketing in our society in general and increased focus on children and youth in particular. The hunt by schools for additional revenue also plays a role in a couple of ways: First, they may perceive a direct benefit from programs that provide them with funds or relieve them of certain expenses. Second, they may perceive that being seen as good “partners” with business will enhance their broader political support, further enhancing their financial security. To a limited extent, however, there is some indication that a shift in public consciousness about commercialism is reshaping the way it manifests itself.

Supply, Demand, and Enabling Forces

Marketers’ interest in selling to and through children remains unabated. The Center for Science in the Public Interests estimated in 2005 that marketing aimed at young people totals \$15 billion a year, twice what it was a decade ago.⁶⁰ For businesses

who want to target the market, opportunities to reach it can be expected to be highly tempting. Thus, for instance, AOL Time Warner's Time for Kids magazine, although it carries no advertising, promotes brands through supplemental materials that include games, puzzles and contests that teachers can distribute to children in classes. According to a *Seattle Times* report, the company tells prospective advertisers: "Build your brand with direct access to a powerful audience in a highly regulated and hard-to-reach environment."⁶¹

Meanwhile, schools continue to face funding challenges, such as when school board members in Wisconsin's Mequon-Thiensville school district wrestled with a \$1 million shortfall and weighed cutting half-day kindergarten, charging \$400 a year to students participating in sports, or selling naming rights to buildings.⁶²

In the absence of a strong, countervailing ethic that would put schools off limits to corporate marketing plans, the combination of these two factors leads almost inevitably to pervasive schoolhouse commercialism.

Commercialism itself often is wrapped in benign trappings. The publisher Scholastic Inc. is a long-time fixture in American schools, through its sale of books in classrooms. The same brochures advertising books, however, also market other products, including toys and video games.⁶³ Moreover, the same company engages in a variety of other in-school advertising and marketing programs through cross-promotions in partnership with other firms.⁶⁴ Indeed, a lawsuit filed by a law firm based in Seattle in January 2006 charged that Scholastic "uses its marketing presence within elementary schools to convince parents to purchase educational products, and then bombards parents with unsolicited goods, demanding payment in violation of state and federal law."⁶⁵

Some commercial entities have found ways to respond adroitly to controversy over their activities. In the face of continuing concern about the appropriateness of its mandatory commercial broadcasts in classrooms, Channel One in March 2006 hosted a workshop on “Media Literacy” at the National Association of Secondary School Principals conference in Reno, NV.⁶⁶

The Shape of Commercialism in 2005-2006

Possibly the most remarked-upon trend in 2005-2006 was the expansion of efforts to curtail the sale and marketing of so-called junk foods in schools. Three specific events helped drive this phenomenon: School districts worked to implement a 2004 federal law that required local districts to approve so-called wellness policies by the start of the 2006-2007 school year; states continued, with varying success, to pass laws limiting in-school access to sodas and junk foods; and the beverage industry itself entered a highly-publicized, voluntary agreement that reduced somewhat the distribution of sodas in certain school settings.

School Wellness Policies

A 2004 federal law requires that public schools receiving federal aid to help pay for school lunches for needy students develop and implement local school wellness policies as a condition of that aid.⁶⁷ Some schools, such as the public schools of Lincoln, NE, responded by going beyond the federal law to take more concrete action, such as removing candy bars and other high-sugar, high-fat snacks from school vending machines.⁶⁸ Elsewhere, however, the wording of wellness policies ran into conflicts with

the longstanding reliance of school districts on commercial relationships. An April debate on the school board of School District 60 in Pueblo, CO, is illustrative: The proposed wellness policy included recommendations that students receive more nutrition education and “be encouraged to drink more water instead of sodas.”⁶⁹ But while the head of the school district’s health programs, Bev Samek, said the policy reflected high rates of diabetes, obesity and asthma in Colorado, the school board’s president fretted about the impact of the policy on school fundraisers.⁷⁰

State and Local Restrictions

In addition to restrictions that were part of local school and school-district wellness policies, individual districts as well as state governments took various actions to limit some product sales on health grounds. These ranged from the passage of state laws or regulations banning or restricting sugared sodas or junk foods in Connecticut⁷¹, New Jersey,⁷² North Carolina,⁷³ and California,⁷⁴ among other places, to a variety of local actions.

In Larimore, N.D., a ban on soda machines was initiated by the school’s Future Farmers of America (FFA) club—the sole in-school beneficiary of vending machine revenues. Explaining the club’s decision to remove the soda machines that it depended on as part of its fundraising, the school’s FFA advisor, Max Danner, said: “We felt eventually, they are going to force us to do it anyway, and we wanted it to be proactive rather than reactive.”⁷⁵ In addition to removing soda from vending machines, the measure included a ban on students bringing soda to school or the distribution of soda in classroom parties, but did not extend to a ban on the sale of soft drinks at athletic events.

⁷⁶ Vending machines dispensing flavored water, sports drinks, fruit juice, and milk were not eliminated; neither was a candy and snack machine.⁷⁷

The reaction of a North Dakota state education official assigned to administer state school nutrition programs illustrates how deeply embedded soda vending is in the culture of some public education institutions: Instead of hailing the decision as a step forward for better student health, Deb Egeland, nutrition program manager for the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, said shutting down soda vending “is just plain horrible,” and added: “Schools need the money and kids still need to drink something.”⁷⁸

In Maryland, where new state guidelines set limits on the levels of fat, saturated fat, and sugar per serving, some school districts imposed stiffer limits, banning high-sugar or high-fat snack foods from vending machines and even from sports booster-club fundraising programs.⁷⁹

The Beverage Industry’s Voluntary Agreement

The 2005-2006 school year saw an evolution in the soft-drink industry’s response to the growing backlash to its presence in schools. After years of opposing state and local campaigns to ban soft drinks in schools—and in the face of legislative battles in at least 38 states over school nutrition bills that generally addressed vending machines, and the passage of 14 such laws across the nation⁸⁰—the American Beverage Association (ABA) began to tack differently. In the summer of 2005 the ABA, including market leaders Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, offered a proposal to ban soft drink sales in elementary and middle schools during the day and to require that at least half of the slots in high school vending machines to be stocked with drinks such as water or juice.⁸¹ A report on

that proposal, however, noted its “practical impact... would not be huge” for two reasons: policies already in place—although not uniformly followed—against selling carbonated soft drinks in elementary schools; and the very small share of soda companies’ revenues that sales in schools represented—less than 1 percent for Coke, for example.⁸²

The beverage association formally announced the voluntary agreement August 17,⁸³ following up with a publicity campaign including millions of dollars in advertising launched in the fall.⁸⁴ Hoping to further disarm the regulatory movement, in December 2005 the beverage association released a report that non-diet soft drinks sold in schools had declined more than 24 percent between 2002 and 2004.⁸⁵ The trade association’s president, Susan Neely, characterized the findings as evidence that banning the products was unnecessary: “Litigation and legislation aren’t the answers to a complex social problem,” she said. “Consumer preferences are changing, and the choices students are making from school vending machines are reflecting that.”⁸⁶ Erik Peterson, a spokesman for the School Nutrition Association, however, contradicted her assertion that “choice” was driving the decline. Peterson cited data that two-thirds of U.S. schools had restricted the kinds beverages or foods that could be sold.⁸⁷ Moreover, Marion Nestle, a New York University nutrition professor and critic of the soda industry, observed that the same beverage association data showed that high-sugar sports drinks were displacing soda; Nestle pronounced the trend “a substitution of one bad product for another.”⁸⁸

Critics of the industry, however, kept up the pressure. A little-noted August 2005 report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that 75 percent of all high schools, 65 percent of middle schools and 30 percent of elementary schools had some form of exclusive beverage-vending contract.⁸⁹

While *Newsweek* reported in August 2005 that soda and candy vending machines can produce returns to individual schools or districts of up to \$75,000 a year,⁹⁰ a study in Portland, OR., raised questions about how much schools really benefited. The Portland-based Community Health Partnership (CHP), a public health advocacy group, concluded that the amount of money schools received ranged from \$12 to \$24 per student annually.⁹¹ A leading critic of the food and soft-drink industries, the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) in Washington, D.C., made plans to file a lawsuit in Massachusetts along with lawyers who were veterans of the legal push against tobacco companies against Coke, Pepsi, and their local bottlers, seeking a ban on the sale of sodas in schools.⁹²

In May, the industry announced a voluntary agreement, brokered by former President Bill Clinton, the American Heart Association, and Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, a Republican, that expanded the August 2005 plan, pulling sugary sodas entirely from schools. Under terms of the deal, beverage companies agreed to sell in elementary and middle schools only water; certain juices with no added sweeteners; and low-fat, regular or flavored milk, and to limit portion sizes to 8 ounces in elementary schools and 10 ounces in middle schools. In high schools, the agreement permits diet and unsweetened teas, diet sodas, so-called “fitness water,” sports drinks, and light juice drinks, with portion sizes limited to 12 ounces.⁹³ *An Atlanta Journal and Constitution* report on the accord put it in context: “From a pure sales standpoint, the policy is not a big deal for the beverage industry. Schools generate less than 1 percent of sales for Coke and Pepsi in North America. Schools, however, have been good places to create loyalty among the next generation of customers.”⁹⁴

The agreement was sweeping enough that CSPI abandoned its plans for an anti-industry lawsuit.⁹⁵ Yet it still had limitations. CSPI's director, Michael Jacobson, indicated his organization's concerns about the potential for still-permitted diet sweetened drinks to promote tooth decay.⁹⁶ Additionally, as a writer at the *Kansas City Star* noted, the agreement imposed no limits on advertising on school property for the same, banned products.⁹⁷

In contrast to the partial measures taken in the U.S., meanwhile, it is worth observing that in Europe, the industry also agreed to end advertising to children under 12—a provision notably missing from the U.S. voluntary agreement.⁹⁸ Moreover, France banned soda and junk food sales in schools outright.⁹⁹

Reaction to Restrictions

The industry's voluntary bans and various state and local restrictive policies produced some reaction, but it was mostly muted. Here and there, commentators rejected the idea of schools or legislators imposing nutritional standards on schools as ineffectual,¹⁰⁰ a wrong-headed attempt at replicating Prohibition,¹⁰¹ or promoting a “nanny state.”¹⁰² Some schools greeted the industry ban in May 2006 with concern about the impact of declining sales of soda on their own revenue streams.¹⁰³ A high school principal, responding to California's proposed junk food ban, wrote in a letter to the editor that “high school programs depend on the ‘Coke machine’ to survive....Frankly the schools just don't have enough money. Because of this new law, there will be fewer uniforms, more expensive yearbooks and a decline of programs.”¹⁰⁴

Children's health as a marketing opportunity

Children's health itself has become for some companies a marketing opportunity. Thus, at the Food Marketing Institute's annual convention in May 2006, soft-drink purveyors Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Cadbury Schweppes "promoted waters, juices and fruit drinks as well as classic fizzy drinks" for the children's market, *Advertising Age* reported. Other firms introduced sweetened, flavored milk drinks and bottled waters.¹⁰⁵

Yet the rush to substitute juice for soda does not necessarily represent a significant improvement from the standpoint of health; as Dr. Ari Brown, a Texas pediatrician and author told New York Times health reporter Jane Brody: "you're trading a can of sugar for a can of sugar."¹⁰⁶ With that in mind, WaddaJuice, a Connecticut distributor of juices mixed with 75 percent water (marketed as lower in sugar than 100 percent fruit juices) in 2006 enthusiastically began courting schools directly for vending contracts.¹⁰⁷

In 2005 PepsiCo, which had previously created a "SmartSpot" program that labeled low-calorie soda, juices, and its Quaker-brand granola bars as purportedly healthier products, revised its sales strategy for schools to recommend only SmartSpot products for elementary schools.¹⁰⁸ Subway—which for years has built its advertising around the theme that its fast-food sandwiches are lower in fat and higher in healthful ingredients than the hamburgers and fried chicken of its competitors—has sponsored classes taught in elementary schools and after school at Boys & Girls Clubs called "Feud Food: Where Food and Fitness are Fun."¹⁰⁹ Juicy Juice, a fruit-juice brand distributed by the food giant Nestle, teamed up with Scholastic Inc. to create a free nutrition curriculum that was distributed to more than 190,000 teachers nationwide and coupled with a contest

for students who kept a personal food journal as homework.¹¹⁰

McDonald's, meanwhile, began an in-school fitness and health instruction program called "Passport to Play," which it reportedly placed in 31,000 schools enrolling 7 million children.¹¹¹ McDonald's also sponsored assemblies in Canadian schools under the name "Ronald McDonald Go Active School Show"—but at least one parent protested. Joanne Arnold of Colwood, British Columbia, called the assembly "subtle, sneaking marketing" and complained that her 7-year-old daughter, Zoe, who attended the assembly, "asked me why Ronald was there when I tell her the food's not good for her."¹¹²

Advertising

Advertising is commonplace in many school venues—athletic field scoreboards, gymnasiums, and buildings themselves through the sale of naming rights. Yet 2005-2006 also saw pockets of opposition to the practice. While there are not enough data to draw firm conclusions, it is possible that this sporadic, reported opposition may be a harbinger of more widespread discomfort with the practice, which in turn may explain why searches in association with in-school advertising showed an appreciable drop-off in numbers, as discussed earlier in this report.

In some cases schools or districts stood up for longstanding, anti-advertising policies. The Bay District School Board in Panama City, FL, passed a policy change in May 2006 barring businesses from sending to students and faculty "scholarship" solicitations that were thinly veiled marketing schemes for karate studios.¹¹³ The measure strengthened a decade-old policy against advertising on school grounds that had

been bargained for by unionized teachers who had been barraged with faculty meetings called mainly to sell products.¹¹⁴ The school board in Honolulu, HI, rejected in November 2005 efforts to rescind a long-established policy banning in-school advertising.¹¹⁵

Additionally, there are scattered indications of a loss of interest in advertising in schools. Philadelphia offered naming rights and other advertising opportunities at its new sports facilities, working with a firm called Premiere Sports Marketing Group.¹¹⁶ The district, however, was unsuccessful in finding a buyer for the naming rights.¹¹⁷

Some advertisers appear to have been turned off to the school market. In New York, for instance, the state's Department of Education stopped providing free student planners to 875,000 students because the publisher said it could not sell enough advertising.¹¹⁸

There are other instances of advertising facing either political resistance or merely apathy on the part of potential advertisers. Even so, commercial enterprises continue to find new spaces in which to market products. GradMoments LLC in May 2006 announced a new diploma that includes an embedded image of the diploma recipient. The firm offers the diploma for free, encased in clear plastic envelope bearing advertising for corporate sponsors.¹¹⁹

Sponsorship, School Reform, and For-Profit Education

The continued pressure on schools and school systems to improve test results, driven in large part by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), has in turn prompted some new developments and variations in the interaction between private

corporations and public schools.

For instance, in Chicago, under a policy that predates NCLB but has been furthered by it, Mayor Richard M. Daley has set a goal of replacing so-called failing public schools with smaller programs, often run by charter schools.¹²⁰ Some three dozen corporations are involved in establishing some of those schools, pledging an estimated \$22 million collectively to cover start-up costs. One of the oldest examples is Ariel Community Academy, a school founded in 1996 and subsidized by a Chicago-based mutual fund manager, Ariel Capital Management LLC. Through a corporate foundation, Ariel pays salaries of 13 school employees. Additionally, Ariel and Nuveen Investments, another firm, each give \$10,000 to the entering class each year. The money is used as an investment portfolio, the management of which is a significant part of Ariel Academy's curriculum. John Rogers, Ariel Capital's chief executive officer, explains the pedagogical value of the gift this way: "Inner-city kids, kids at risk, need to really have an understanding of what saving and investing are all about."¹²¹ Not incidentally, if the school is successful at helping its students learn lessons for their own economic well-being as they grow older, it would seem likely that they will form a significant market base for Ariel and Nuveen's services.

Corporations are involved in the Chicago schools in a variety of ways. Some have contributed money primarily for public schools, even new public schools, such as Northern Trust Corp., which gave \$3 million for those purposes.¹²² Others have focused their donations on charter schools: J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. gave \$1 million to Donoghue Charter School, opened in the fall of 2005 by the University of Chicago; and an architecture firm, Perkins & Will Inc., gave free design services to the Perspectives

Charter School, operated by former Chicago Public Schools teachers.¹²³ The law firm of Sonnenschein, Nath & Rosenthal spent more than \$1 million to open Legacy Charter School in 2005, and reportedly was directly “working with education experts to plan every detail of the school and its curriculum.”¹²⁴

After-school tutoring programs may present a significant growth opportunity still for corporations. NCLB includes a provision requiring that schools falling short of prescribed achievement goals—as measured by standardized test scores—contract with outside tutoring services rather than employing their own teacher corps to provide tutoring. Based on both that requirement and on reports suggesting that these services are as yet operating at well below capacity,¹²⁵ it seems likely that supplemental services will represent a growth area for private education companies in the coming years.

In Indianapolis, a consortium of businesses joined together to establish a completely private school that targeted low-income families and incorporated a work-study program in which students would go to work in the operations of sponsoring corporations.¹²⁶ It is not unreasonable to speculate that, if successful, the program might prompt political efforts to promote public participation—through vouchers or perhaps private school scholarship tax credits—in the future.

In some specific instances, commercial ventures are hitting roadblocks. In 2003 New York City formed a Marketing Development Corporation to raise money for city coffers through branding relationships.¹²⁷ The city went on to sign a contract making Snapple the city’s official beverage, putting its products in city buildings and schools. Although the deal originally was purported to be worth as much as \$66 million to the city, the Marketing Development Corporation in March 2006 asked to amend the

agreement, lowering its sales targets, with the effect of reducing the city's revenue from the project to \$17.7 million.¹²⁸

Countering such examples, however, are broader trends that reflect its deepening pervasiveness in the larger society.

One such development is that schools themselves are reporting greater pressure to advertise—a reaction to the emergence of charter schools and other forms of competition advocated by believers in market-based school reform. In Dayton, OH, for example, the public school district reportedly spends nearly \$500,000 over two years in advertising. “It’s been forced upon us to compete for students,” said the school board’s president, Gail Littlejohn.¹²⁹

Who is Interested in School Commercialism?

A recurring finding of trends reports has been the relative absence of coverage of schoolhouse commercialism in the education press. This trend has continued with little appreciable change. Over the 15-year time span of report data, the education press (searched through Education Full Text service), accounted for 1 percent of all references; the LexisNexis popular, business, and advertising and marketing presses the remaining 99 percent. Simply put, the topic has yet to become one that managed to get on the “radar screen” of education journals in any consistent and systematic way.

By contrast, as shown in Figs. 3 through 9, in recent years the Markets and Industry and Business/Finance News searches have shown a consistent and marked increase in every category, while the News, All (English, Full Text) searches have shown a parallel decrease. These numbers suggest that, to editors working in the

business, advertising, and marketing sectors, the subject of schoolhouse commercialism is becoming one of intense interest.

There are two likely reasons for this. Marketing to children in general and marketing to children in schools specifically involves greater amounts of money and is seen as a potential growth area in business. But it is also likely that much of the attention reflects industry sensitivity and desire to keep tabs on the continued challenges to schoolhouse commercialism. Indeed, an article in *Promo* reflects both these divergent concerns: The rewards of the youth market, and the risks of backlash from trying to court the market through schools. The result, reported Andrew Scott, the author of the article, is that some marketers are tweaking their programs in order to deflect criticism of the practice—without stepping back from the general principle of marketing to youth wherever possible:

As parents and regulators work to bar junk food and soft drinks from school, brands are refining their marketing efforts. Companies that come across as too pushy could find themselves expelled ...

School sporting events have long provided a showcase for brands; given recent pressures, the appeal of these events as brand platforms is growing.¹³⁰

What that means, however, is not a withdrawal from schools as marketing venues, but rather a recalibration of marketing campaigns. In that vein, suggests Scott, marketers appear to view school sports and similar extracurricular venues as safer bets for advertising without creating a public backlash.¹³¹

International Trends

Articles in the international press surface in virtually all of the searches, albeit irregularly. By and large, their content mirrors that of the U.S. coverage, with the topic of child nutrition providing a major focal point. Corporate educational projects, writes the *Financial Times* of London, “are as prevalent in Mumbai as they are in Manchester and Minneapolis; a growing trend that matches schools’ need for resources with businesses’ need to be seen to be doing good.”¹³²

A 2005 survey in Canada of 3,100 schools for the first time sought to quantify the extent of commercialism in that country’s schools. Conducted by the Canadian Federation of Teachers and other organizations, the survey found that:¹³³

- 35 percent of grade schools participate in incentive programs such as Campbell’s Soup’s Labels for Education that encourage people to buy particular brand names in order to help increase funds for the school;
- 54 percent of high schools report the presence of corporate advertising;
- 56 percent of high schools have exclusive agreements with soft drink manufacturers to sell only their wares in vending machines; and
- Only 12.3 percent of schools reported having any policy applying to corporate-sponsored curriculum materials.

Conclusion

The lines dividing commercial media, whose primary purpose is to sell a product or an idea, from media that are primarily aimed at either conveying independent information or promulgating an artistic vision—journalism, entertainment, or school curricula, for example—have become so blurred as to be virtually non-existent. Among younger audiences, the line separating editorial and advertising content arguably no longer exists at all. As David Carson, a founder of Heavy.com, a web site aimed at male viewers in their late teens and twenties, told the *New York Times* in a March 2006 interview, young people see no difference between entertainment and advertising.¹³⁴

The conflation of substantive content and marketing content is hardly remarkable given the ubiquity of branding and advertising in virtually every conceivable corner of life. The ubiquity of marketing helps frame attempts to question the status quo of schoolhouse commercialism as odd or quixotic. Rare, and as yet outside the political and cultural mainstream, are assertions such as that from Sen. Tom Harkin, Democrat of Iowa, who in 2005 told delegates to the federal government's Healthy Schools Summit: "We need to return to the days when our public schools were special places, commercial-free zones that fed our children nutritious food, and saw to it that recess and physical education were a part of every school day. Schools should be a sanctuary, not just another marketplace hawking junk food and sugary sodas."¹³⁵

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