

# **Cafeteria Nutritional Guidelines for Corporations in Schools: Paving the Way for Healthy Choices**

**By Angela Pang**

**Executive Summary.** Food insecurity is prevalent throughout Florida, and oftentimes the only food source to which children have consistent access is cafeteria food from school. Due to existing nutritional guidelines, healthy food is available in school cafeterias, but children may not find such choices appealing. Therefore, most children will choose tastier but unhealthier food selections from corporate food providers selling their food on-campus, which leads to obesity, malnutrition, and other preventable chronic illnesses such as diabetes. Chronic diseases cause 7 in 10 deaths each year in the United States, and unhealthy food is the leading cause of chronic diseases.<sup>1</sup> Corporations in schools give the children unhealthier meal choices at the time when their physical and mental development is most affected by food insecurity. Corporations often benefit from being certified as healthy and following nutritional guidelines.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, if corporations are encouraged to follow school nutritional guidelines, children would be able to eat plentifully and healthily no matter what they decide. The effectiveness of these changes have been proven time and time again in pre-existing policies.<sup>3</sup>

**Statement of the Problem.** The only consistent meals for most food insecure children are school lunches. School lunches are generally healthy since they follow specific nutritional guidelines, but often there are other choices either on the cafeteria menu or from corporate food providers. Those corporations are not beholden to nutritional guidelines, and thus often carry higher-calorie, unhealthier, but tastier foods than cafeteria meals. Children inevitably choose the more delectable option of corporate food and suffer from chronic diseases in the long run. This results in \$12K worth of pediatric hospital bills that have to be paid by businesses as insurance and tax burdens.

**Pre-existing Policies and Regulations.** Below is a listing of current policies and regulations related to nutritional guidelines.

- **Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.**<sup>4</sup> This policy updates the meal patterns and nutrition standards for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs to align them with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, requiring most schools to increase the availability of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free and low-fat fluid milk in school meals; reduce the levels of sodium, saturated fat and trans fat in meals; and meet the nutrition needs of school children within their calorie requirements.
- **Health and Sustainability Guidelines.**<sup>5</sup> The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Hubert H. Humphrey Building Cafeteria was the first federal food service operation to implement the General Services Administration (GSA) Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations, but by March 2012, all of GSA's 32 federal facilities in the Capital Region have

incorporated them. The guidelines are made to eliminate industrially produced trans fats, decrease sodium content, and allow individuals to make informed choices through labeling of menu items. Monthly cafeteria sales increased by 34 percent on average compared to the same time period in the year before the changes were made. The success of the program is due to educating consumers about the changes and support from key leadership at all levels.

- **Vending Protocols for a Healthier Community.**<sup>6</sup> Palm Beach County Health Department has nutrition standards for food sold in vending machines. The standard used to measure each product is the Food Guide Pyramid recommendation on discretionary calories (100 – 300 calories).
- **County of Los Angeles Vending Machine Nutrition Policy.**<sup>7</sup> Los Angeles County requires that 100% of all snacks and beverages sold in vending machines on government property must meet the State of California's Nutrition Guidelines?.
- **Healthy Snacks: Nutritional Standards for Portland Parks & Recreation's Community Centers and Pools**<sup>8</sup>. In August 2010, the City of Portland's Parks and Recreation Department adopted their "Healthy Snacks Nutritional Standards" for all food and beverages sold at community centers and pools. The standards are the same as those used for Oregon high schools. These nutritional standards are based on standards set by Oregon House Bill 2650, Healthy Foods for Oregon Students, passed by the legislature in 2007, which outlines snack and beverage guidelines for schools. Recognizing that recreation facilities also serve adults, the standard allows calorie limits up to 250 calories for snacks; but products geared toward youth are expected to be limited to 200 calories.
- **Nutrition and Physical Activity Policy and Guidelines: Making Healthy Options Available for All.**<sup>9</sup> In Alameda County, 50% of food and beverage items for county-funded events, vending machines, catering, and cafeterias are expected to be healthier, with seasonal fresh fruits and vegetable, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products. More reusable utensils and dishware will be used. There are opportunities and incentives to stay physically active and participate in wellness activities during lunch and at breaks as well as more opportunities to incorporate physical activity into on-the-job travel. All changes were based on principles of wellness, nutrition, physical activity, and sustainability.
- **Nutritional Standards 2012.**<sup>10</sup> The Santa Clara County Public Health Department food and beverage policy went into effect July 1, 2012. The standards are required for county meetings, events, vending machines, and custodial populations, including the Department of Correction, the Department of Probation, the Social Services Agency, and the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center. Additionally, the standards are recommended for cafeterias, cafes, and county-leased properties.
- **Executive Order 13-06: Improving the Health and Productivity of State Employees and Access to Healthy Foods in State Facilities.**<sup>11</sup> On October 30,

2013, Governor Inslee issued Executive Order 13-06, which requires all executive agencies to adopt the Washington State Healthy Nutrition Guidelines. The Guidelines are based on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Washington is the first state in the country to establish such comprehensive food service guidelines. Each agency must fully implement the Guidelines by December 31, 2016.

- **Better Bites: Nutritional Guidelines.**<sup>12</sup> As part of the Better Bites Program, all 17 restaurants in Kentucky State Parks have 80% of items on the children's menus meeting the Better Bites nutrition standards and meals are served with a side of fresh fruit or vegetable. These options are not limited to children.

**Policy Options.** Below is a list of policy options that are explored in this brief.

- **Option No. 1.** Give tax breaks to corporations that follow the nutritional standards for school meals.
- **Option No. 2.** Require corporations to follow existing nutritional standards for school meals in order to provide food on campus.
- **Option No. 3.** Enact financial penalties for corporations that fail to meet existing nutritional standards for school meals.

**Advantages and Disadvantages Policy Options.** Below is a list of the advantages and disadvantages of each of the three policy options listed above.

- **Option No. 1 Advantage.** Money saved from tax break may encourage more corporations to serve nutritious meals.
- **Option No. 1 Disadvantage.** The tax break would increase taxes for the rest of taxpayers and/or reduce services and programs already funded through taxes.
- **Option No. 2 Advantage.** All meals at schools would be healthy choices regardless of what the students choose.
- **Option No. 2 Disadvantage.** Some corporations may not wish to work with schools, or charge more for healthier versions of their food.
- **Option No. 3 Advantage.** No corporation is blocked from cafeteria access despite unhealthy menu options, but there is a strong incentive to create healthier menu items for kids.
- **Option No. 3 Disadvantage.** Some children may invariably choose the unhealthy "\$1 menu" item over more nutritious meals.

Each option can increase the profits by marketing the brand as a healthy and socially conscious company – there is precedent demonstrating that when companies choose pro-social methods of making profit, they gain more customers than those who do not.

**Recommendation.** **Option No. 2** guarantees a healthy meal for the children, and still gives them the liberty of choosing. Following nutritional guidelines helps corporations attract customers by advertising their healthiness. This public policy change would express that the health of children is more important than the bottom line of corporations, which in turn could lead to increase profits. Thus, the corporations benefit from serving healthier food to children, which lead to savings in healthcare. If the

cafeteria only had safe options, the students will not find themselves eating too many calories and too little nutrition as they normally would with commercially-prepared food.<sup>1</sup>

**Annotated Endnotes.** The following resources were used to support the statements made in this policy brief.

1. Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2015, October 28). Retrieved December 1, 2015, from <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/index.htm>

*This report outlines the CDC's comprehensive data on health and chronic disease.*

2. Armour, S. (2008, February 7, updated February 8). Corporate cafeterias go the green, healthy route. *USA Today*. Retrieved from [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2008-02-07-cafeteria-healthy\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2008-02-07-cafeteria-healthy_N.htm)

*This news article describes companies going green because it leads to savings in healthcare, benefiting from the increasing demand for healthy, sustainable food and practices.*

3. Pressler, M. W. (2004, July 20). Catering to corporations: More institutional cafeterias are offering healthful choices. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com>

*This news article highlights major food companies undergoing a menu overhaul to include healthier options in corporate cafeterias, universities, hospitals and other settings.*

4. Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, 77 Fed. Reg. 4088 (January 26, 2012) (to be codified at 7 C.F.R. pts. 210 & 220). Retrieved from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-01-26/pdf/2012-1010.pdf>

*This policy details the national nutritional standards of school meal programs, requiring them to align with Dietary Guidelines for Americans.*

5. Bayne AI, Hair E, Harris Brewer K, & Garg A. (2012). *The HHS Hubert H. Humphrey Building Cafeteria Experience: Incorporation of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010 into Federal Food Service Guidelines*. Prepared by NORC at the University of Chicago. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Retrieved from [https://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/case\\_study\\_humphrey\\_building\\_cafeteria\\_experience\\_may\\_2012.pdf](https://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/case_study_humphrey_building_cafeteria_experience_may_2012.pdf)

*This case study details the results of incorporating the Dietary Guidelines for Americans into the Hubert H. Humphrey Building Cafeteria.*

6. Palm Beach County Health Department. (n.d.) *Vending Protocols for a Healthier Community*. Retrieved from [http://palmbeach.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/clinical-and-nutrition-services/nutrition/\\_documents/vending-protocols.pdf#search=%22vending%20protocols%22](http://palmbeach.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/clinical-and-nutrition-services/nutrition/_documents/vending-protocols.pdf#search=%22vending%20protocols%22)

*This policy describes how the Palm Beach County Health Department created new vending protocols that limit excess calories, sugar, and fat in vending machines.*

7. Los Angeles County. (2009). *Board of Supervisors Manual*. Retrieved from <http://countypolicy.co.la.ca.us/BOSPolicyFrame.htm>

*This policy details the healthier options in the vending machines of Los Angeles County.*

8. Portland Parks & Recreation. (2010). *Healthy Snacks Nutritional Standards for Portland Parks & Recreation's Community Centers and Pools*. Retrieved from <http://www.portlandonline.com/parks/index.cfm?a=312791&c=43957>

*This policy improves the nutritional content of items sold in our Community Centers and Swimming Pools to individuals who use our facilities.*

9. County of Alameda California. (2010). *Nutrition and Physical Activity Policy & Guidelines: Making healthy options available for all*. Retrieved from [https://www.acgov.org/sustain/documents/Nutr\\_Policy\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://www.acgov.org/sustain/documents/Nutr_Policy_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

This policy requires that a healthful choice of refreshments be offered at all County-sponsored functions at which meals or snacks are served and that more physical activity opportunities at the workplace and during the commute

10. County of Santa Clara, California. (2012). *Nutrition Standards 2012 Implementation Guidance*. Retrieved from [http://www.banpac.org/healthy\\_worksite/section4hw/7-sccnutritionstandards.pdf](http://www.banpac.org/healthy_worksite/section4hw/7-sccnutritionstandards.pdf)

*This policy for healthier food and beverage nutrition standards are required for Santa Clara county meetings, events, vending machines, and custodial populations.*

11. State of Washington, Office of the Governor. (2013). *Improving the Health and Productivity of State Employees and Access to Healthy Foods in State Facilities*. Executive Order 13-06. Retrieved from [http://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/exe\\_order/eo\\_13-06.pdf](http://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/exe_order/eo_13-06.pdf)

*This policy implements a comprehensive wellness program for the State of Washington.*

12. Healthier menu items for kids now available at all 17 Kentucky State Parks restaurants. (2013). *KYforward*. Retrieved from <http://www.kyforward.com/healthier-menu-items-for-kids-now-available-at-all-17-kentucky-state-parks-restaurants/>

*This article explain the Better Bites program for healthier children's menu options.*

13. Kaplan, S. (2009, October 19). Healthy eats: How to overhaul the worksite cafeteria. Retrieved from <http://www.shrm.org/hrdisciplines/benefits/articles/pages/worksitecafeteria.aspx>

*This article describes the ways in which companies can overhaul the worksite cafeteria by changing the menu, teaching healthier choices, provide financial incentives, and offering support.*