

# **GUIDANCE FOR HEALTHY ALA CARTE IN NORTH DAKOTA SCHOOLS**

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- [Attachment B](#) School Meals Programs—State Competitive Policies
- [Attachment C](#) School Nutrition Consensus Panel—Competitive Food Standards Recommendations
- [Attachment D](#) Middle School Drink Project—Summary of Results in all Three Fargo Middle Schools
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## I. Introduction

Schools are in a unique position to help improve nutrition habits and physical activity of students. Children are taught in classrooms about good nutrition and the value of healthy food choices. However, student access to competitive foods and beverages has increased during the past decade, and foods served in the classroom, used for fundraisers, or sold throughout the school are frequently low in nutrients and high in calories. Students receive a mixed message when good nutrition is just an academic exercise but not practiced throughout the school. Competitive foods often do not support the message that good nutrition is important to their health or education.

Schools can model and reinforce classroom lessons about nutrition and health by replacing unhealthy food offerings with healthy ones. To send the right message, administrators, teachers, school foodservice personnel, parents and the community must promote healthy lifestyle principles.

This document addresses the role of schools in supporting children to develop healthy eating habits. More specifically, it discusses competitive foods in the school, including ala carte offerings. School foodservice directors have the authority to change ala carte offerings to benefit the students' health.

**Guidance for Healthy Ala Carte in North Dakota Schools** is designed for school nutrition personnel who may be considering the development of standards and/or nutrition policies so that ala carte items are consistent with the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#).

The narrative section of this document (pages 1 through 12) provides background, statistics, and resource information. It is designed to help school nutrition personnel move towards offering healthier ala carte and competitive foods within the school. The attachments provide tools to use as changes are considered.

Attachments G through J are especially helpful for developing standards and/or nutrition policies for competitive foods, including ala carte. The lists were developed to show what items meet selected criteria. Since many states and companies have used the California Nutrient Standards for competitive foods as a model, sample lists with food items that meet those criteria have been included in this document. The California nutrient standards recommended in 1999 for ala carte and other competitive foods are:

- ✓ Not more than 35% of total calories from fat (excluding nuts and seeds).
- ✓ Not more than 10% of total calories from saturated fat.
- ✓ Not more than 35% of total weight composed of sugar.

## **II. The Need for Healthy Competitive Food Standards-Including Ala Carte**

Historically, general nutrition guidelines such as the [Food Guide Pyramid](#), the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) and the USDA School Meal Patterns were developed to address the nutrition needs of individuals over the course of a day or a week. Based on the premise that ‘no food is bad food’ and ‘every food fits,’ these guidelines assumed people eat whole meals and that the content of those meals can balance out over time.

Unfortunately, many students do not choose a nutritionally balanced meal. Many high school students are eating breakfast and lunch from ala carte lines, vending machines, and the school store. Typically, these items are large portions, as well as high in fat, sugar, sodium and calories. When nutritionally inadequate foods are available and promoted to students at school every day, it becomes increasingly difficult to ‘balance out’ their excesses.

While the federal government has established nutrition standards for school meals, there are no nutrition standards for competitive foods—foods and beverages sold ala carte, in vending machines, in school stores, or as part of school fundraisers. At the same time, school foodservice operations attempt to maintain financial stability by selling more competitive foods, many of which are less healthy.

### **Facts About the Epidemic of Childhood Obesity and Students’ Eating Habits**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has declared child and adolescent obesity in the United States as an epidemic. According to CDC, shifts in food practices such as increases in fast food, portion size, and soft drink consumption along with increases in snacking and meal skipping have occurred during the same period as obesity rates have increased.

Over the past 20 years, the percentage of overweight children has more than doubled. Overweight children ages 6-11 rose from 6.5% in 1980 to 15.3% in 2000. The percentage of overweight adolescents aged 12 to 19 tripled during the same time.

North Dakota is no exception. According to the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, self-reported data collected from students indicates that almost 28% of 7-8 graders and 20% of 9-12 graders are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

In April 2002, local public health nutritionists and nurses collected height and weight measurements on 827 North Dakota rural and urban sixth grade students in more than 40 classrooms across the state. The survey results show that one out of every six North Dakota sixth graders (16%) is overweight (body mass index (BMI) greater than or equal to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for age).

The percentage of overweight students in North Dakota is slightly higher than the 15% found in national health surveys. Rural students in North Dakota were more likely to be overweight (19%) than students in urban areas (12%). Boys were more likely to be overweight (18%) than girls (14%).

The current childhood obesity epidemic has significant medical and psychosocial consequences. First, there is a strong correlation between childhood and adult overweight. Fifty percent of overweight children and teens remain overweight as adults. Second, adult obesity is associated with a number of chronic diseases including diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and some cancers. Evidence indicates that Type II diabetes is increasing in children and adolescents--an increase that parallels the rising childhood obesity rates. In the early 1970's, Type II diabetes was referred to as 'adult onset diabetes'. Pediatricians across the country are now reporting that children as young as six years of age are being diagnosed with this condition. Also, a number of studies have detected high rates of cardiovascular disease risk factors among very young children. This may be the first generation of children born after WWII whose lifespan will actually decrease due to a lifestyle that puts them at very high risk of chronic disease.

Obesity has serious and persistent psychosocial consequences for children. Overweight children are at increased risk for discrimination. Feelings of low self-esteem, poor body image, and symptoms of depression are associated with obesity.

The causes of this epidemic are complex and multifaceted, resulting from changes in eating habits and decreased physical activity. Efforts to address these factors must be comprehensive and must engage communities, schools, families and other institutions in supporting healthy diets and physical activity for children.

### **Eating and Physical Activity Habits of Children**

Only 2 percent of school age children (ages 2 to 19) meet the recommended minimum number of servings from the five major food groups of the [Food Guide Pyramid](#). Three out of four children consume more saturated fat than is recommended in the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). Here are some more examples of children's eating and physical activity habits:

1. Four out of every five children, and three out of four high school students do not eat the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Instead, they are consuming foods of low nutrient density such as candy, cookies, chips, doughnuts, and french fries.
2. There has been a dramatic increase in soft drink intake in school-aged children over the past 20 years while the rate of milk intake has decreased. Those who drink soda on a regular basis have a calorie intake that is 200 calories greater than the calorie intake of children who do not drink soft drinks regularly. A study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health found that for each additional can or glass of soda or juice drink a child consumes per day, the child's chance of becoming overweight increases by 60%. Eighty-one percent of teenage girls are not getting enough calcium in their diet because they drink more soda than milk.
3. The number of calories children consumed from snacks increased by 30% between 1977 and 1996.
4. Children spend an average of four hours a day watching TV, and another half hour playing computer games. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting TV/computer games to two hours a day.

5. Less than half of children are physically active for an hour every day, which is the minimum amount of physical activity recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
6. Between 1989 and 1996, children's calorie intake increased by approximately 80 to 230 extra calories per day, depending on the child's age and activity level. The Children's Nutrition Research Center in Houston, Texas reports that at the rate many overweight students are downing excess calories, they will need to walk three miles or more a day to prevent further weight gain (a 260 calorie intake is equivalent to a three-mile or 60 minute walk).

### **III. The Important Role of Schools in Promoting Healthy Eating**

Schools play a significant role in providing food to children and in shaping their lifetime dietary habits. Schools are uniquely positioned to model and reinforce both the healthy eating and physical activity behaviors that children need throughout their lives. On the nutrition side, schools have the opportunity to:

- ✓ Provide students with healthy foods to eat.
- ✓ Teach nutrition and healthy eating in the classroom.
- ✓ Model healthy food choices by ensuring that the school environment is one that is free from the intense marketing and the availability of less healthy foods found in the unrestricted marketplace.

Schools benefit from promoting and supporting good eating habits. Healthy eating plays a very important role in learning and cognitive development. Poor diet has been found to adversely influence the ability to learn and decrease motivation and attentiveness (Nutrition-Cognition National Advisory Council, 1996). Such findings indicate that young people will not be ready to learn and achieve their full potential unless they are healthy and well nourished.

#### **What About a Healthy School Nutrition Environment?**

Administrators, school foodservice personnel, teachers and other adults know that what occurs in schools mirrors what is happening in the larger world around them. The Surgeon General's "Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity," encourages changing the school environment. Strengthening or implementing school nutrition standards and/or policies is an important step to improving the school nutrition environment and the health of children.

A healthy school nutrition environment (HSNE) is one where healthy eating and an active lifestyle are taught and supported in the classroom, the cafeteria, and throughout the school. It gives students consistent, reliable health information and messages and ample opportunities to practice healthy habits.

Parents, nutrition professionals, other health professionals, and education agencies have become more concerned about the widespread availability of foods and beverages in schools that are not part of school meal programs. As a result, more surveys and resources have concentrated on improving the school nutrition environment.

In October 2002 a survey was conducted by the [National Food Service Management Institute](#) (NFSMI) to learn more about a HSNE from the perspective of school personnel. A random national sample of K-12 school foodservice directors and managers, superintendents, principals, school business officials, teachers and coaches were asked to rank the most important components and barriers related to a HSNE.

The top five components identified and ranked as important for a HSNE in decreasing order of importance were 1) behavior focused nutrition education, 2) adequate funds provided by local, state, and federal sources, 3) ala carte menu items that contribute to healthy eating patterns, 4) involvement of students and parents in developing food and nutrition policy, and 5) meal schedules that meet the hunger needs of children. Refer to [Attachment A](#) for the executive summary and recommendations, or view entire report, "[Healthy School Nutrition Environment: Results of a Nationwide Survey of School Personnel](#)".

Even though most respondents perceived they already had a HSNE, there were noted differences in opinions between foodservice personnel and other school personnel. A main recommendation from this report is that school personnel need more collaboration with each other on policies and programs that will support a HSNE.

Over the past few years more resources have been developed to provide more background and direction for school administrators, teachers and school foodservice personnel. The resources assist teams in working together to develop and support nutrition standards and/or policies aimed at promoting lifelong healthy eating. USDA's resource is "[Changing the Scene-Improving the School Nutrition Environment](#)", an action kit to help schools improve their school nutrition environment. The action kit can be ordered for free at [www.fns.usda.gov/tn](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn).

Another resource, "Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn," developed by the National Association of State Boards of Education, is a school health policy guide. Chapter E provides information on establishing school policies to support a healthy school nutrition environment. Section 4 of Chapter E includes a sample policy for 'other food choices at school' and discusses model standards for school councils or committees charged with establishing nutrition standards. The "Changing the Scene" kit includes chapter E as supplemental material from "Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn".

#### **IV. Competitive Foods in Schools-Including Ala Carte**

Food items sold during meal periods outside the cafeteria—from vending machines, student stores, school fundraisers, food carts, or food concessions—are known as 'competitive foods'. They compete with the school food program for student buyers. Ala carte foods are sold individually in the cafeteria, but outside of the regulated National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal. None of the ala carte or competitive foods are bound by the [Dietary Guidelines](#) to which the NSLP must adhere.

Students have numerous venues such as vending machines, ala carte offerings, and student stores at which to purchase foods throughout the day. Often they contribute little to student's diets apart

from salt, fat, sugar and excess calories. The most common items sold out of vending machines, school stores, snack bars, and at times as ala carte in a school foodservice program include: 100% juice, fruit drinks that are not 100% juice, sports drinks, soft drinks, salty snacks, candy and high-fat baked goods.

According to USDA 2001 data, competitive foods are widely available on school campuses. In fact, 76% of high schools, 55% of middle schools and 15% of elementary schools had food or beverage vending machines for student use. School stores or canteens were available in 41% of high schools, 35% of middle schools and 9% of elementary schools. Nine out of 10 schools have ala carte available at lunchtime.

The prevalence of foods sold outside the NSLP is on the rise. In a 2003 study of California high schools, more than 70% of the responding districts reported selling pizza, chips, cookies and soda. In comparison, there was only one healthy item (fruit) that was sold by over 70% of responding districts.

The sale of competitive foods could result in: 1) a decrease in NSLP participation and revenue due to increased vending purchases (Schools that prohibit sales of competitive foods have shown increased participation in the NSLP.) 2) the sale of more foods with lower nutritional value in ala carte, 3) a decline in student consumption of healthier foods, 4) an increased stigma of participation in NSLP since children with money are often more able to purchase competitive foods, and 5) students purchasing competitive foods even when they can not afford it.

### **What is being done nationally about competitive foods?**

States across the country have a variety of standards regulating competitive foods in schools. Refer to [Attachment B](#) for a 50 state table with state statutes and policies for competitive foods. State mandates vary from limiting times of sales to requiring the income from competitive food sales to accrue to the school foodservice account. In April 2004, 23 states had bills pending that address school nutrition. In 2003, two states enacted laws regarding vending and 20 states already had some type of competitive food policy. Some major school districts, such as Los Angeles and Philadelphia are making policy changes.

In recent years, California has been noted for recommendations or laws establishing nutrition standards for foods sold in schools. In August 1999, the California Center for Public Health Advocacy established a panel of respected state and national experts to develop recommendations for nutrient standards for competitive foods sold in California schools. This National Consensus Panel on School Nutrition prepared the March 2002 report "Recommendations for Competitive Food Standards in California Schools" (available at [info@publichealthadvocacy.org](mailto:info@publichealthadvocacy.org)). The panel recommended the establishment of mandatory minimum standards for elementary and secondary schools, addressing beverages, fat and saturated fat, sugar, portion sizes, and the availability of fruits and vegetables (See [Attachment C](#)).

In 2002, a new law (SB 19) was passed with nutrition standards to become operative in January 2004 if funds were appropriated to increase state meal reimbursements by ten cents for all meals

served. In February 2004, SB 1566 (Escutia) was introduced and amended in June 2004 to implement the competitive food standards from SB 19 with no requirement to increase state funding for the federal meal program. Refer to [www.PublicHealthAdvocacy.org](http://www.PublicHealthAdvocacy.org) to check out current laws and implementation dates on the California nutrition standards for foods sold in schools.

The common-sense ideas that guided the panel's recommendations were:

- ✓ Food is meant to be enjoyed. A healthy diet can include snacks, desserts, side dishes and reasonably sized portions of most of student's favorite entrees.
- ✓ Schools should be adequately funded, eliminating any incentive schools have to raise funds to support programs by selling foods and beverages that compromise children's health.
- ✓ Schools should be a safe haven where students can learn to make healthy food choices outside the usual unrestricted market place with its intense marketing and ready availability of less healthy foods.
- ✓ Schools should not contradict health and nutrition messages taught by parents and teachers.
- ✓ Children, schools, manufacturers, and growers can all win by promoting the sale of healthy foods.

The panel encouraged local, state, and national policy makers to adopt the standards as one step toward addressing the current epidemic of childhood obesity. Once implemented, standards will help maintain children's health, ensure that children are ready to learn, and will guarantee that school environments support parents and teachers in encouraging children to establish the healthy eating behaviors.

## **V. School Foodservice and the Role of Competitive Food**

Unfortunately, school foodservice is caught between the competing pressures of serving children nutritious foods and running a financially stable foodservice business. The USDA 2001 studies have shown that schools across the country are relying heavily on sales of competitive foods in order to boost their profits and remain financially stable.

Healthy foods sold as part of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) can provide a forum for teaching healthy eating habits. In a USDA analysis of dietary intake data, children who ate the NSLP meal had higher intake of vegetables, milk, dairy products, protein rich foods and many other nutrients. They also had lower intakes of added sugars than children who did not participate in the NSLP (Mathematica, 2001). At the same time, USDA has found that sales of competitive foods undermine the nutritional integrity of the school meal programs and discourage participation.

In accordance with the National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act of 1996, schools are required to offer varied and nutritious food choices that are consistent with the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). School meals must meet nutrition standards in order for a school foodservice program to receive federal subsidies. They must meet the following guidelines over the course of each week:

- ✓ Limit total fat to 30% of calories and saturated fat to 10%.
- ✓ Meet 1/3 of the RDA for calories, protein, iron, calcium, vitamin A and vitamin C.
- ✓ Provide a variety of foods moderate in sugar and salt, and high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

In contrast, competitive foods are not required to meet comparable nutrition standards. USDA currently has very limited authority to regulate these foods. Schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program must prohibit the sale of foods of minimal nutritional value (FMNV) in the foodservice area during the designated meal periods. A FMNV provides less than 5% of the Reference Daily Intake for eight specified nutrients per serving. FMNV include carbonated sodas, water ices, chewing gum, and certain candies (hard candy, jellies and gums, marshmallow candies, fondant, licorice, spun candy, and candy-coated popcorn). Many competitive foods, such as chocolate candy bars, chips, or fruitades (containing little fruit juice), are not considered FMNV. These food items may be sold in the school cafeteria during meal times.

The [American Dietetic Association](#) (ADA) and the [School Nutrition Association](#) (SNA), formerly the American School Food Service Association, are two organizations concerned with students' nutritional well being. Both organizations have issued position papers and/or core concepts that support not only competitive foods restriction, but the extension of that idea to all foods made available to children at school. The ADA position paper states that "Availability of competitive foods poses three major problems: 1) it diverts income essential to the financial well being of the school meal program, 2) it encourages the consumption of partial meals, and 3) it fosters the erroneous idea that school meals are only for needy children."

Both ADA and SNA recommend local efforts in all schools to develop strategies to ensure that the nutrition needs of students are a high priority of the education system. They both recognize that while the school nutrition or foodservice department traditionally has been solely responsible for the school nutrition program, today that responsibility is broadening to include other members of the education team. The ADA position paper recommends that local efforts "begin with an assessment of the environment in which school nutrition programs operate. This will include a determination of the degree to which school administrators and boards of education recognize and accept their responsibility to provide healthful foods and nurture students' acceptance of those foods. Local teams of creative, caring persons can raise the community's awareness of the impact school nutrition programs may have on students' immediate needs, future health, and quality of life. Effective strategies will vary, depending on how well schools are currently meeting needs. However, strategies should be developed in all schools to ensure that the nutrition needs of students are a high priority of the education system."

School nutrition personnel play a pivotal leadership role in a school committed to nutrition integrity. According to the School Nutrition Association: "Nutrition integrity in school food and nutrition programs means a level of performance that assures all foods and beverages available in schools are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and when combined with nutrition education, physical activity, and a healthy school environment, contributes to enhanced learning and the development of lifelong, healthy eating habits."

To promote nutrition integrity school foodservice programs are encouraged to:

- ✓ Adhere to nutrition standards based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid.
- ✓ Consider student preferences in menu planning.
- ✓ Provide meals with enough calories to support growth.
- ✓ Evaluate the nutritional value of foods over a period of time.
- ✓ Purchase food items that meet expected quality and nutrition standards.
- ✓ Prepare foods in ways that provide optimal nutrition and student acceptance.
- ✓ Carefully select other foods offered in addition to meals (ala carte foods) to promote nutrition and encourage healthy eating habits.
- ✓ Provide a pleasant eating environment.
- ✓ Promote nutrition education.
- ✓ Develop cooperative efforts between nutrition professionals and other school/community members.

## **VI. Will Schools Lose Funds if National, State or Local Standards or Regulations for Competitive Foods –Including Ala Carte Are Strengthened?**

Coinciding with schools' changing culture are budget cuts affecting school systems. The federal government invests significant resources in the school meal programs (\$8.4 billion in FY 2002, including cash payments and commodities), and has nutrition standards for those meals. In addition, it provides technical assistance and support for states and local foodservice authorities to meet those standards. Competitive foods of poor nutritional quality undermine that investment.

The [USDA Food and Nutrition Service](#), Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation completed a study in 2001, "School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study- II". The summary of findings show the average weekly earnings from ala carte were:

- \$375/week – elementary schools
- \$1,760/week – middle schools
- \$1,985/week – high schools

Significantly, **weekly ala carte revenue is inversely related to student participation in the school lunch program.**

Reports vary on whether schools will lose funds if competitive food and/or ala carte nutrition standards are established. These schools saw no revenue loss:

- ✓ North Community High School in Minneapolis replaced most of its soda vending machines with machines stocked with 100% fruit and vegetable juices and water and slightly reduced the prices of healthy snack options. As a result, the sale of healthier items increased and the school has not lost money.

- ✓ A middle school and high school in Philadelphia changed their vending machines' beverage contents to include only 100% juice, 25% juice drinks and water. Average monthly revenue from the machines increased.

In North Dakota, Fargo Public Schools and Fargo Cass Public Health studied healthier beverage options on the ala carte line. The March/April 2003 study targeted middle school students Ben Franklin Middle School to: 1) educate students on healthier beverage selections, 2) provide only milk, 100% fruit juice, and water on the ala carte line during the lunch hour for five weeks, 3) assess student beverage choices and attitudes on having more nutritious beverage selections available before and during the intervention, 4) assess the number of beverage containers sold before and during the intervention, and 5) assess revenue change on beverage sales before and during the intervention. The abstract for the Ben Franklin Middle School and summary of results for all three Fargo Middle Schools are included as [Attachment D](#). After the educational intervention, the total number of beverages sold at the Ben Franklin Middle School increased by 344 containers per week with an average increase in profit of \$90.06 per week during the intervention.

## **VII. Considerations for Implementation or Changes in Ala Carte Offerings in Your School**

Since enactment of the National School Lunch Act, dramatic social and economic changes have influenced eating habits. Students today are used to a 'fast food' society. They tend to 'graze' during the day rather than eat at specific mealtimes. They are accustomed to having a wide variety of food items available to them throughout the day. To meet the expectations and demands of students today, school foodservices have considered, or are currently selling, ala carte items.

Defined as food items priced and sold separately from a meal, ala carte sales can be as simple as selling extra milks, second entrees, or additional food items such as cookies and ice cream bars at the end of the meal. For some schools, it is purchasing and maintaining vending machines throughout the entire school, or as extensive as operating all-day snack bars.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School Nutrition Team developed a resource, "Competitive Foods and Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value-Fostering Nutrition Integrity In Ala Carte Sales and Other Foods Available at School". This resource includes information and tools helpful to review if you are considering adding ala carte offerings or changing present offerings. It can be accessed at [www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dfm/fns/pdf/competve.pdf](http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dfm/fns/pdf/competve.pdf), or refer to the selected sections included in [Attachment E](#). Note the "Ten Considerations for Assessing Ala Carte Sales in the Foodservice Area". The first question asks: "Are food items nutritious?"

Another resource to consider for improving the school nutrition environment is the Minnesota's Changing the Scene. It can be accessed on the ND Child Nutrition and Food Distribution website at <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/child/team/tips.pdf>.

The Minnesota tool kit has these hints for healthy ala carte:

### Tips for Ala Carte Providers

- ✓ Serve snacks that are low in calories but nutrient-dense (low-fat granola, energy bars, fruits/vegetables).
- ✓ Offer incentives for healthy selections (price reductions, chance to win prizes)
- ✓ Ask your vendor to provide marketing for items at base of pyramid and place these selections at eye level for maximum sales effect.
- ✓ Use glass front or air curtain coolers to market healthy items.
- ✓ Offer single/regular-size portions rather than over-size portions.
- ✓ Encourage students to create promotional campaigns to market healthy foods and beverages.
- ✓ Introduce healthy selections served in cool packaging.
- ✓ Pair very healthy foods with lighter fat items.
- ✓ Keep entrée as much a part of the school meals as possible—Offer higher priced options ala carte.

In March 2003, parents at Aptos Middle School in San Francisco produced a seven-page guide on getting rid of junk food at schools. The document is available on the “Education Policy Studies Laboratory” website at <http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps/CEU/Articles/CEU-0303-45-OWI.pdf>. Their “ten steps to healthier school food” include many practical tips for school personnel or community members trying to offer healthier food items to students.

## VIII. What School Foodservice Personnel Can Do to Improve Children’s Nutrition

You can make a difference by considering nutrition standards and nutrition policies for your ala carte lines and/or other competitive foods throughout your school. This document presents several lists of foods that meet selected criteria or nutrition standards. Use these tools as a guide on the types and brands that could be offered for these selected nutrition standards. The items listed could be used for ala carte sales. As you work with others in your school, the list can illustrate the types of items that would be offered if standards and/or policies are developed for all competitive foods sold at school.

[Attachments G through J](#) lists foods as examples to meet the specified criteria and are divided into four groups:

1. Healthy Ala Carte List, Calories From Fat 35% or Less
2. Healthy Ala Carte List, Less Than 35% Sugar by Weight
3. Extra Healthy Ala Carte List, Less Than 35% Calories From Fat and Less Than 35% Sugar
4. Not So Healthy Ala Carte List

## **IX. Conclusion**

Nutritionally inadequate foods are widely available at school every day. This makes the nutrition guidelines for school meals less effective. In such an environment, it is important for schools to consider nutrition standards and/or policies for individual foods sold throughout the school. Schools can take action!

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## **HEALTHY SCHOOL NUTRITION ENVIRONMENT: RESULTS OF NATIONWIDE SURVEY OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Healthy eating behaviors and physical activity are important for children's health and physical well-being. The United States Department of Agriculture developed the *Changing the Scene Improving the School Nutrition Environment* kit to promote a healthy school nutrition environment (HSNE). An HSNE gives students consistent, reliable health information and ample opportunity to use it. The purpose of this survey was to learn more about HSNE from the perspective of school personnel and have school personnel rank the most important components and barriers related to an HSNE.

A nationwide pilot survey (n=350) of K-12 school foodservice directors and managers, superintendents, principals, school business officials, teachers, and coaches was conducted in January 2002 in order to refine the survey instrument for the subsequent study of healthy school nutrition environment. The response rate was 41.4% (n= 145). A few minor changes to the survey instrument were made following analysis of the pilot survey responses.

In October 2002 the final survey was sent to a random national sample of K-12 school foodservice directors and managers, superintendents, principals, school business officials, teachers, and coaches. A total of 3,500 surveys was mailed, 500 from each group. The response rate was 34.9% (n= 1,222). Forty-eight percent of respondents were from districts with less than 2,500 students; 33% had 2,501-10,000 students; and 19% had more than 10,000 students. Eighty-nine percent of respondents were from districts that participate in the National School Lunch Program. An HSNE was a high priority for 53% of respondents and 40% selected family education as most important for increasing awareness of HSNE.

Respondents identified and ranked the important components of an HSNE. The components were ranked in decreasing order of importance as follows:

- behavior-focused nutrition education
- adequate funds provided by local, state, and federal sources
- á la carte menu items that contribute to healthy eating patterns
- involvement of students and parents in developing food and nutrition policy

- meal schedules that meet the hunger needs of children
- adequate time for children to enjoy their meals with friends
- school meals that meet USDA nutrition standards as well as provide choices
- sufficient serving areas to ensure student access to meals with a minimum waiting time
- adults and peers as role models for healthy eating
- healthy snacks in vending machines, snack bars, and school stores
- customer service
- adequate dining space
- pleasant ambiance

Respondents ranked the following components as barriers to an HSNE in decreasing order of importance:

- funding for school foodservice
- competitive foods
- children's peer pressures HSNE – Nationwide Survey 7
- television/media
- menus
- funding for school activities
- cafeteria atmosphere
- parental attitudes

Even though most respondents perceived they already had an HSNE, the survey responses to questions about vending, school stores, and fundraisers indicated that there are many opportunities for schools to enhance and maintain a healthy school nutrition environment. More collaboration is necessary among school personnel concerning policies and programs that will support a HSNE.



**Food and  
Nutrition  
Service**

## **School Meals Programs**

### **State Competitive Foods Policies**

*Updated by USDA  
September 2002*

<b>STATE</b>	<b>POLICY</b>
<b>Alabama</b>	The sale of foods of minimal nutritional value during meal service times will continue to be prohibited. Schools are required to restrict student access to concession, extra sales, vending and fundraisers that are in direct competition with the Child Nutrition Program during meal services anywhere on campus. If income from such sales occurs, the revenue is required to be deposited into the Child Nutrition account.
<b>Alaska</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Arizona</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Arkansas</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>California</b>	<p>The law currently in effect, requires that 50% of the items, other than foods reimbursed under federal law, offered for sale each school day at any school site by any entity or organization during regular school hours be selected from a prescribed list of foods.</p> <p>In 2002, a new law (SB 19) was passed. The law will become operative Jan. 2004 if funds are appropriated in Budget Act of 2003 for the purpose of increasing State meal reimbursements by ten cents for all meals served; including paid, free, and reduced price meals. Establishes nutrition standards at <u>elementary schools</u>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The only food that may be sold to pupils during breakfast and lunch periods is food that is sold as a full meal. Fruit, non-fried vegetables, legumes, beverages, dairy products, or grain products may be sold as individual food items if they meet the following nutrition standards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not more than 35% total calories from fat (excluding nuts and seeds)</li> <li>- Not more than 10% total calories from saturated fat</li> <li>- Not more than 35% total weight from sugar (excluding fruits and vegetables)</li> </ul> </li> <li>2) The only beverages that can be sold are water, milk, and juice that is at least 50% fruit juice with no added sweeteners.</li> <li>3) Foods sold as part of fundraising are exempted from the above standards if sold off campus or one-half hour after the end of the school day.</li> </ol> <p><u>In Middle Schools:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) No carbonated beverage allowed from ½ hour before school to end of the last lunch period.</li> </ol> <p><u>In High Schools:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The above standards will only be implemented in 10 or more school</li> </ol>

	sites that are awarded a two-year grant.
<b>Colorado</b>	No competitive foods offered on campus from ½ hour prior to until ½ hour after the last regular breakfast or lunch. This may be waived for mechanically-vended beverages in senior high. Federal regulations for FMNV cannot be waived for any grade level.
<b>Connecticut</b>	No extra food items anywhere on campus from ½ hour before and after any state or federally subsidized milk or foodservice program. Extra foods means tea (including iced tea), coffee, soft drinks, and candy. Income from sales of any foods served on campus during this time must accrue to the foodservice account.
<b>Delaware</b>	USDA Regulations. (Has recommended policies.)
<b>District of Columbia</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Florida</b>	No competitive foods in elementary schools. No competitive foods sold until one hour after last lunch period in secondary schools. However, in high schools, the sale of carbonated beverages is allowed at all times if a 100% fruit juice is sold at each location where the carbonated beverages are sold. The location cannot be where breakfast or lunch are served or eaten. 100% juice may be sold all times during the day at any location.
<b>Georgia</b>	No foods of minimal nutritional value in elementary school until last lunch group is scheduled to return to class. In other schools, no foods of minimum nutritional value in dining, serving or kitchen areas during mealtime.
<b>Guam</b>	
<b>Hawaii</b>	The sale of food in all elementary and secondary schools shall be limited to the School Breakfast Program, School Lunch Program and approved cafeteria supplementary food items. Schools shall not permit anywhere on campus the sale of the other foods from the beginning of the school day to the ending of the school day except certain beverages through vending machines. These beverages may not be sold during meal serving periods. (At least one machine shall vend bottled water. Coffee and coffee-based beverages are not allowed.) Vending machines on elementary campuses should not be accessible to students.
<b>Idaho</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Illinois</b>	No competitive foods in elementary schools during regular breakfast and lunch periods. Competitive foods include all confections, candy, potato chips, carbonated beverages, fruit drinks containing less than 50% pure fruit juice, tea, coffee, and any other foods or beverages designated as such by the State Board of Education. Income from sale of all food and beverages provided in any dining or serving area during the designated breakfast and lunch periods shall accrue to the foodservice account.
<b>Indiana</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Iowa</b>	USDA Regulations

<b>Kansas</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Kentucky</b>	No competitive foods on campus until ½ hour after last lunch period.
<b>Louisiana</b>	Competitive foods are allowed in Grade K-6 before the end of the last lunch period and in Grades 7-12 before the last 10 minutes of each lunch period only if income accrued to the school foodservice account and expended only for Child Nutrition Program purposes. Ala carte meal service is prohibited. However, extra items may be sold only to those who have received a complete meal and the items must meet component requirements as defined by Enhanced Food-based Menu regulations. The only exceptions are milkshakes, yogurt, frozen yogurt, ice cream, and ice milk. Full-strength juice, milk, and bottled water (unflavored with no additives) may be sold at any time during the day to anyone, whether or not they have purchased a meal.
<b>Maine</b>	Only the School Foodservice Program can sell food/beverages (that exceed the 5% minimal nutritional value per 100 calories rule) on campus during the school day and profits must accrue to the foodservice program. However, local school boards may establish, by policy, a process whereby a school or approved student organization is allowed to benefit from the sale of such foods and beverages.
<b>Mariana Islands</b>	
<b>Maryland</b>	No foods of minimal nutritional value until the end of the last lunch period.
<b>Massachusetts</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Michigan</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Minnesota</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Mississippi</b>	No food is to be sold on campus for one hour before breakfast or lunch and until the end of either serving period. School Foodservice shall sell only those foods that are components of the approved Federal meal patterns being served (or milk products). With the exception of milk products, a student may purchase the individual components of the meal only if the full meal also is being purchased.
<b>Missouri</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Montana</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Nebraska</b>	No competitive foods anywhere on campus from ½ hour before until ½ hour after breakfast or lunch.
<b>Nevada</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>New Hampshire</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>New Jersey</b>	No food of minimal nutritional value on campus until the end of the last lunch period. Funds from sale of foods and beverages during the hours of operation of the school lunch and breakfast programs must accrue to the

	foodservice account.
<b>New Mexico</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>New York</b>	From the beginning of the school day until the end of the last scheduled meal period, no sweetened soda water, no chewing gum, no candy including hard candy, jellies, gums, marshmallow candies, fondant, licorice, spun candy and candy coated popcorn, and no water ices except those which contain fruit or fruit juices, shall be sold in any public school within the State.
<b>North Carolina</b>	Competitive food sales are allowed in the lunchroom or its general environs if the profits accrue to school foodservice and used solely for the school meal programs. Schools may sell extra food items after the established lunch hour is over, only with the approval of the local board of education. Local board approval is also needed to sell soft drinks to students so long as soft drinks are not sold during the lunch period, at elementary schools, or contrary to the requirements of the National School Lunch Program. Ala carte foods may not include food of minimum nutritional value.
<b>North Dakota</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Ohio</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Oklahoma</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Oregon</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Puerto Rico</b>	
<b>Rhode Island</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Samoa</b>	
<b>South Carolina</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>South Dakota</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Tennessee</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Texas</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Utah</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Vermont</b>	USDA Regulations
<b>Virginia</b>	Any food or beverage sold (including ala carte) in Virginia schools from 6:00 a.m. until the end of breakfast period, and during the lunch period, must meet the following nutrition standard. The foods and beverages sold must either be a recognized component of the food based meal pattern or must contain 5% of the Daily Value, per serving or per 100 calories, of at least one of these eight essential nutrients: iron, calcium, protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, niacin, thiamine, or riboflavin. The money from the sale of food or drink during the protected time periods must accrue to the school nutrition program account. Iced or hot coffee or tea may not be sold to students; non-carbonated water may be sold.

	<b>Virgin Islands</b>	USDA Regulations
	<b>Washington</b>	USDA Regulations
	<b>West Virginia</b>	No foods of minimal nutritional value may be served or sold to students during the instructional day, except that county boards may permit the sale of soft drinks in county high schools except during breakfast and lunch periods. Revenues accrue to the principal for purchase of school supplies and to the faculty senate for allocation. The state has nutritional standards for foods served in schools during the day including: 1) no foods containing 40% or more sugar by weight, 2) any juice or juice product must contain a minimum of 20% real juice, and 3) all “other” foods shall reflect the Dietary Guidelines for fat by limiting the number of fat grams to not more than 8 per one ounce serving, or meet the USDA standard for a lunch component. Only meal components may be sold as ala carte for breakfast, and only fluid milk, milkshakes and bottled water (100% natural spring water containing no additives) may be served as ala carte items for lunch.
	<b>Wisconsin</b>	USDA Regulations
	<b>Wyoming</b>	USDA Regulations

**Federal Regulations Definitions:**

Competitive Foods: Means any foods sold in competition with the Program to children in foodservice areas during the lunch periods.

Food of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV) means:

- (i) In the case of artificially sweetened foods, a food which provides less than five percent of the Reference Daily Intakes (RDI) for each of eight specified nutrients per serving; and
- (ii) In the case of all other foods, a food which provides less than five percent of the RDI of each of eight specified nutrients per serving.

The eight nutrients to be assessed for this purpose are - protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, niacin, riboflavin, thiamine, calcium, and iron. The categories of FMNV include: soda water, water ices, chewing gum, certain candies, hard candy, jellies and gums, marshmallow candies, fondant, licorice, spun candy, and candy coated popcorn.

Table 1

## School Nutrition Consensus Panel

### COMPETITIVE FOOD STANDARDS RECOMMENDATIONS

GRADE LEVEL	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	RATIONALE	EXAMPLES OF WHAT WOULD BE IN & WHAT WOULD BE OUT
<b>ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS</b> (Schools that have grade 6 or lower)	<b>ALL COMPETITIVE FOOD</b>	Eliminate sale of all foods sold outside the school meal program during the school day. Individual items sold during morning / afternoon breaks must meet the standards described below for secondary schools.	(1) Young children should not have the opportunity to make unhealthy food choices at school; (2) The school environment should model healthy choices.	<b>Out:</b> All individual foods sales except fruits and vegetables, 100% fruit juice, low-fat / non-fat milk during the lunch period. <b>In:</b> Healthy options during nutrition break.
<b>SECONDARY SCHOOLS</b>	<b>BEVERAGES</b>	<b>Allow sale of:</b>		
		Beverages that contain at least 50% fruit juice with no added sweeteners	Fruits and vegetables contain necessary nutrients.	<b>In:</b> Fruit juices, Knudsen Spritzer
		Water	Water is an essential nutrient and a healthy beverage choice.	<b>In:</b> Bottled water
		Low- fat / nonfat milk	Availability promotes calcium consumption without contributing unnecessary calories from fat.	<b>In:</b> Low- fat and nonfat milk and chocolate milk
		<b>Eliminate sale of:</b>		
		Soft drinks, sports drinks, punch, iced tea, and other drinks containing less than 50% real fruit juice.	Eliminates beverages with little nutritional value and others that replace more healthful alternatives.	<b>Out:</b> Coke, Pepsi, Fruitopia, Sunny Delight, Snapple, Gatorade
		Beverages that contain caffeine (except chocolate milk)	Schools should not promote the consumption of habit-forming substances	<b>Out:</b> Coffee, teas

GRADE LEVEL	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	RATIONALE	EXAMPLES OF WHAT'S IN & WHAT'S OUT
SECONDARY SCHOOLS	SNACKS, SWEETS, SIDE DISHES	<b>Portion Size:</b> See attached chart	Larger serving sizes can lead to over-consumption	<b>Out:</b> All large- sized portions
		<b>Fat:</b> No more than 30% of total calories from fat	High- fat foods add unnecessary calories to the diet	<b>In:</b> Baked potato chips, pretzels, some popcorn, some granola bars, some baked French fries
		<b>Saturated Fat:</b> No more than 10% of calories from saturated fat	Foods that are high in saturated fat increase the risk of coronary artery disease by raising blood cholesterol	<b>Out:</b> Regular potato chips, fried French fries, some granola bars
		<b>Sugar:</b> No more than 35% by weight (except fresh, dried or canned fruits and vegetables)	Eliminate foods that (1) are high in calories and low in nutrients, and (2) promote development dental caries.	<b>In:</b> Some granola bars, trail mix, animal crackers, graham crackers, Devil's food cookies, gelatin desserts, fat -free fudge bar, frozen fruit bar  <b>Out:</b> Some granola bars, some cookies, all candy
	ENTRÉE ITEMS and SIDE DISHES	<b>Portion Size:</b> No larger than portion served as part of school lunch.	Extra- large- sized portions add unnecessary calories, including calories from fat, especially saturated fat.	<b>In:</b> Reasonable portions of pizza, hamburgers, burritos, chili dogs, chicken nuggets <b>Out:</b> All oversized portions
FRUITS AND VEGETABLES	Require the availability of quality fruits and vegetables at any place competitive foods are sold	Fruits and vegetables provide needed nutrients without adding low- nutrient -dense calories. Students must have healthy food options	<b>In:</b> All fruits and vegetables: fresh, cooked, dried, and canned without additional sweeteners.	

Table 2

## School Nutrition Consensus Panel

### RECOMMENDED PORTION LIMITS

<b>Snacks and Sweets</b>	<b>1.25 oz</b>
chips, crackers, popcorn, cereal	
trail mix, nuts, seeds, dried fruit	
Jerky	
<b>Cookies / cereal bars</b>	<b>2 oz</b>
<b>Bakery items</b> (e.g., pastries, muffins)	<b>3 oz</b>
<b>Frozen desserts, ice cream</b>	<b>3 oz</b>
<b>Yogurt</b>	<b>8 oz</b>
<b>Beverages</b> (no limit on water)	<b>12 oz</b>

## **MIDDLE SCHOOL DRINK PROJECT SUMMARY OF RESULTS IN ALL THREE FARGO MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

**Attitude Toward Change**-According to pre-intervention surveys, 22% of kids surveyed stated they would be happy if the only beverage choices on the ala carte line were 100% juice, milk and water, 37.5% felt neutral, 34.5% felt sad and 5% did not respond. According to the post-intervention survey, there was a 39% increase in those that felt neutral, an 18% decrease in those that felt happy, and 13% decrease in those that felt sad. This shows that the kids attitudes shifted more towards neutral by the end of the intervention (not as many happy and not as many sad).

**Effectiveness of Educational Drink Posters**-Thirty-four percent of those who took the post-intervention survey stated they looked at the educational drink posters on the cafeteria wall, 65% stated they did not look at the posters, and 1% did not respond. Of those that looked at the posters, 30% stated the posters influenced the beverage selections they made. This shows that some kids will look at educational posters on the walls, and a few will be influenced by the message on the poster.

**Analysis of Total Number of Beverage Container Purchases**-Before the intervention began a total of 70,770 beverage containers were sold in a five week period (from January 13 to February 14, 2003). During the five week intervention a total of 72,852 were sold (from March 10 to April 11, 2003). There was an average increase of 416 containers sold per week during the intervention compared with containers sold prior to the intervention. This shows that kids will purchase what is available to them on the ala carte line. (Data was obtained from weekly purchase orders submitted to the district foodservice office by each school.)

**Analysis of Sweetened Beverages Sold vs. Non-Sweetened Beverages Sold**-There was a 138% increase in the number of Grip N Go milk containers sold, 345% increase for 100% fruit juice, 125% increase for bottled water, 0.1% decrease for carton milk, 0.1% decrease for carton juice, and a decrease of 51.5% for sweetened beverages during the intervention compared with prior to the intervention.

**Revenue Analysis**-There was a total increase in profit of \$383.46 (\$76.69/week) during the intervention compared with prior to the intervention. Once again this shows that the kids will purchase what is available to them on the ala carte line. (Revenue values based on information obtained from Fargo Public School District Nutrition Services Department.)

## ABSTRACT

### **HEALTHIER BEVERAGE OPTIONS ON THE ALA CARTE LINE: A PILOT STUDY TARGETING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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According to the American Dairy Council, more than 65% of schools in the United States allow students to buy food and beverages such as soft drinks, sports drinks, and fruit drinks, from vending machines, ala carte lines or school stores during their lunch period. Teaching children early on to make wise beverage choices, and providing them with healthier beverage options are important for our school systems to do, since children are choosing sweetened beverages over milk and other healthier options at lunchtime. The purposes of the intervention in Ben Franklin Middle School in Fargo were, 1) to educate the students on healthier beverage selections, 2) to provide only milk, 100% fruit juice, and water on the ala carte line during the lunch hour for five weeks, 3) to assess student beverage choices and attitudes on having more nutritious beverage selections available before and after the intervention, 4) to assess the number of beverage containers sold before and during the intervention, and finally 5) to assess revenue change on beverage sales before and during the intervention.

Data from beverage purchases over a period of five weeks were analyzed before the project began. Pre-intervention surveys were administered to 10% of the middle school students enrolled in Ben Franklin. Educational posters comparing drink choices were hung in the cafeteria at least one week before drink choices were changed on the ala carte line, and remained up throughout the intervention. For five weeks only milk, 100% fruit juice and water were offered on the ala carte line. We compromised with the school district to allow V8 Splash, which is 25% juice, on the ala carte line due to a district-wide promotion for this product. At the end of the intervention, 10% of students were resurveyed, and asked similar questions as the pre-intervention survey. When asked how they felt about only having milk, water and 100% fruit juice on the ala carte line, there was no noticeable change in attitudes before and after the intervention. When asked if they looked at the beverage choice posters, 22.5% stated yes. Of those that responded yes, 25% stated the beverage posters influenced the beverage choices they made. The weekly average of sweetened beverages (V8 Splash) sold during the intervention decreased by 61% compared with all sweetened beverages sold before the intervention began. Bottled water increased by 186%, all types of milk increased by 9%, and 100% fruit juice increased by 230%. The total number of beverages sold increased by 373 containers per week with an average increase in profit of \$90.06 per week during the invention. The final goal of this project is for the Fargo Public School system to implement a policy where only milk, 100% fruit juice and water will be offered on the ala carte lines in all three middle schools.

## **POSITIVE ASPECTS OF ALA CARTE SALES**

Ala carte sales offer a variety of benefits to the school district and to the students. Ala carte sales could:

### **Expand services to students.**

- Increase the variety of food items available to students at school.
- Make customers happy and increase number of customers.
- Supplement school meals for students with bigger appetites.
- Supplement meals brought from home.
- Provide an alternate food choice for those students not wanting to purchase a full meal.
- Encourage students to stay on campus.
- Minimize time spent in line by providing alternate lines and grab-and go-selections.
- Provide nutritious snacks for after school activities.

### **Generate additional revenue for the school lunch/breakfast program.**

- Decrease/eliminate transfers from the district's general fund into school foodservice fund.
- Keep meal prices affordable for paying students.
- Generate "extra" money for new foodservice equipment, tables, staff training, etc.
- Capture money for the school lunch program that may have been spent off campus.

## **NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF POORLY PLANNED ALA CARTE SALES**

Without careful planning, ala carte sales could adversely affect the school lunch and breakfast programs. Poorly planned ala carte sales could:

### **Affect viability of the school meal programs if ala carte sales detract and distract from reimbursable meal sales.**

- Decrease state and federal reimbursement.
- Decrease commodity allocations.
- Increase time spent researching, sampling, and purchasing ala carte items instead of new menu items.

### **Decrease school meals program revenue if ala carte items are priced too low.**

- Divert student purchases from reimbursable meals if they can purchase meal components and other foods at a lower price. This may happen if ala carte items are priced too low due to failure to identify ALL costs (food, labor, packaging, equipment, vending machine rental, market value of commodity products, theft, employee sampling, etc.).

### **Discriminate against students who do not have extra money to spend.**

- Increase the possibility of overt identification.

### **Perpetuate negative image of school meals/stigmatize participation in school meal programs.**

- Entice students to purchase individual, perhaps less nutritive, foods rather than purchase a nutritionally balanced meal.
- Further students' perception that ala carte items are more appealing than foods included in reimbursable meals.
- Reduce the number of low-income children willing to accept free or reduced price meals and the number of non-needy children willing to purchase school meals. Since only students with money can purchase a

la carte items, students may perceive that school meals are primarily for poor children rather than nutrition programs for all students.

- Ala carte line offers ‘new’ items more often than the reimbursable line.

**Convey a mixed message.**

- Confuse students who are taught in the classroom about good nutrition and the value of healthy food choices, when they are surrounded by ala carte sales offering low nutrient-density options. Students receive the message that good nutrition is merely an academic exercise that is not supported and therefore not important to health and academic performance.

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING ALA CARTE SALES**

Implementing ala carte sales without jeopardizing the school lunch and breakfast programs can be accomplished. It may require a careful assessment of current or planned ala carte sales. To assess current or planned ala carte sales:

**Ensure that all foods sold on the ala carte line are nutritious.**

- Include food items that contribute to reimbursable meals.
- Review the categories of “Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value”. Food items described in these categories *cannot* be sold in the foodservice area during designated meal periods.

**Set up meal service line(s) to allow students to select reimbursable meals and/or ala carte items.**

- For food based menu planning options, make sure students have access to all five food items/components to meet meal pattern requirements.
- For nutrient standard menu planning option, make sure food items are identified as an entrée, side, or milk and included in the nutrient analysis.
- Market those food items on the ala carte line that contribute to meal pattern requirements so students and cashier staff can readily identify reimbursable meals. For example, 1) use signage and/or color codes so students know how food items contribute to the meal pattern, or 2) advertise daily specials and/or “combos”.

**Set unit meal price for a reimbursable meal that may be obtained by selecting certain food items from the ala carte line.**

- Establish the unit price to be, at a minimum, equal to the price established for full-priced students for a reimbursable meal on the other line(s).
- Remember a student’s decision to decline the allowed number of food items as defined by the school district’s Offer versus Serve policy does not affect the unit price of the meal.
- Consider establishing a tiered pricing system to cover the higher costs of the ala carte items.
- Set the unit price for the reimbursable meal so it is less than purchasing each food item individually for the ala carte price. Consider the reimbursable meal price as a “meal deal” or “value meal”. Remember that the school receives federal and state cash reimbursement, plus commodity entitlement value for each reimbursable meal sold.
- Ensure those students eligible for free and reduced priced meals can go through this line and select a reimbursable meal at no additional cost without overt identification.

### **Tiered Pricing System for Reimbursable Meals**

A tiered pricing system may be established to cover the larger portions and/or increased costs often associated with food items available on an ala carte line. The cost of a reimbursable meal to the paid students from the ala carte line may cost more than a reimbursable meal from the regular line. However, the students eligible for free or reduced priced meals cannot be charged additional costs for the reimbursable meal from the ala carte line. They can be charged the established ala carte prices for extra food items/components and for incomplete/non-reimbursable meals.

#### **Set appropriate prices for ala carte items (foods that are sold separately from a meal).**

- Generate profit (excess of revenue over expenditures) from ala carte sales. Remember student meal payments and other meal revenue sources cannot be used to subsidize ala carte sales.
- Consider food, labor, equipment, and packaging costs to determine selling price. Management and overhead costs should also be considered.
- Consider prices currently charged by competitors (convenience stores, fast food restaurants, vending machines, etc.) in your area to determine selling price.
- Consider the estimated sales of the food items to determine selling price.
- Price individual items to total more than the unit meal price for a reimbursable meal. Remember that ala carte sales *do not* receive reimbursement.
- Limit the number of prices set for food items—price by category. For example, charge a set price for all fresh fruit, entrees, breads/rolls, etc.

#### **Train foodservice staff to recognize a reimbursable meal that may contain food items from the ala carte line.**

- Based on the school district's Offer versus Serve policy, know what food items, combinations, and portion sizes count as a reimbursable meal for the unit meal price.
- Charge for the "extra" food items/components—those items that are not meal components contributing to the reimbursable meal or are second servings.

### **Ten Considerations for Assessing Ala Carte Sales in the Foodservice Area**

1. Are food items nutritious?
2. Are food items sold at a time and in a manner that promotes healthy eating?
3. Are students making good food choices when ala carte items are sold?
4. Are sales that are conducted during the designated meal service times in the foodservice area in conformance with the federal competitive food regulations?
5. Could students obtain a reimbursable meal by selecting certain ala carte items?
6. Are all required food items/components available for selection if students are allowed to purchase/receive reimbursable meals from the array of items on the ala carte line?
7. Have all costs associated with the purchase, preparation, and sale of ala carte items been identified?
8. Are ala carte prices set to cover all costs? If not, are price adjustments needed?
9. Do the prices of various ala carte item combinations that would make up a reimbursable meal meet or exceed the full student meal price and the adult meal price?
10. Are ala carte item prices consistent with prices at local retail stores?

## **SAMPLE ALA CARTE GUIDELINES**

### **Drinks**

Allowable:

- Water
- Fortified and/or flavored water without sweeteners
- 100% fruit juice
- Vegetable juices such as tomato and V8
- Fruit-based drinks that contain at least 50% juice and no additional sweeteners
- Low-fat or fat-free milk, including soy milk and rice milk, less than 28g sugar per 8 oz
- Smoothies fruit and/or dairy based, not to exceed 36g sugar per 8 ounces

Portion sizes shall not exceed 12 ounces except for water.

### **Entrées, Sweets, Snacks and Side Dishes**

- Have 30% or less calories from fat, excluding nuts and string cheese
- Have 10% or less calories from saturated fat
- Have 35% or less weight from sugars, excluding natural sugars in fruits, vegetables and dairy items.

Portion sizes shall be limited to:

- 1.25 ounces for chips, crackers, popcorn, cereal, nuts, and seeds
- 1.5 ounces for trail mix
- 2 ounces for cookies or cereal bars
- 3 ounces for bakery items such as muffins and breads
- 3 fluid ounces for frozen desserts
- 8 ounces for yogurt
- 10 ounces for milk shakes
- 5 ounces for entrees such as pizza, sandwiches or burritos

## Healthy Ala Carte List

### Calories From Fat 30% or Less

Product	Serving Size	Calories per serving	% Total Weight Sugar	% Total Calories from Fat	% Calories from Sat. Fat
Chex Mix, Traditional	51 g	210	6%	17%	4%
Kellogg's Rice Krispi Treats	22 g	90	36%	22%	5%
Keebler Journey Bar, Chocolate	1.3 oz	150	30%	30%	9%
Keebler Journey Bar, Apple Cinnamon	1.3 oz	140	30%	19%	3%
Keebler Journey Bar, Caramel	1.3 oz	140	35%	16%	3%
Nature Valley Chewy Granola Bar, Blueberry Yogurt	35 g	140	37%	23%	13%
Cheerio Milk & Cereal Bar	1.4 oz	160	40%	23%	8%
Kellogg's Special K Bar, Blueberry	23 g	90	35%	17%	10%
Kellogg's Special K Bar, Cranberry Apple	23 g	90	39%	22%	10%
Kellogg's Special K Bar, Peach-Berries	23 g	90	39%	22%	10%
Kellogg's Special K Bar, Strawberry	23 g	90	35%	17%	10%
Kellogg's Nutri-Grain Minis	44 g	160	41%	16%	17%
Power Bar Variety Pack	1 bar	230	31%	10%	2%
Fruit Leather, Stretch Island	14 g	45	86%	0%	0%
Kellogg's Nutri-Grain Bars	1 bar	140	35%	19%	3%
Quaker Chewy Granola Bar Chocolate Chip	28 g	120	32%	29%	11%
Doritos, Baked Nacho Cheese	28 g	120	4%	23%	3%
Baked Lay's Potato Chips	28 g	110	11%	23%	3%
Baked Lay' Sour Cream & Onion	28 g	120	11%	23%	3%
Kashi TLC Crackers	30 g	130	17%	30%	
Guiltless Gourmet Corn Chips	28 g	110	0%	14%	
Crackers, Keebler Original Graham	29 g	130	24%	23%	
Crackers, Keebler Cinnamon Graham	30 g	130	30%	19%	

## Healthy Ala Carte List

### Calories From Fat 30% or Less

Product	Serving Size	Calories per serving	% Total Weight Sugar	% Total Calories from Fat	% Calories from Sat. Fat
Crackers, Keebler Chocolate Graham	31 g	140	29%	25%	
Pringles, fat-free	28 g	70	0%	0%	0%
Ruffles Wow! All Flavors	28 g	70	0-4%	0%	0%
Pretzels	30 g	120	0%	4%	0%
Pretzel Sticks	30 g	120	0%	8%	0%
Teddy Grahams, Nabisco	30 g	130	27%	28%	
Animal Cookies, Iced Keebler	32	130	28%	23%	
Animal Cookies, Keebler	56 g	260	27%	27%	
Dole Fruit Bowl	113 g	60	21%	0%	0%
Chex Morning Mix	32 g	130	25-28%	24%	
Advantage Edge Bar	57 g	220	32%	18%	
Wheatables, Keebler reduced-fat	31 g	140	13%	25%	
Fudgesicle	2.5 oz	90	25%	10%	0%
Tickles Snack Mix	26 g	100	12%	25%	
Nature Valley Chewy Granola Bar, Blueberry Yogurt	35 g	140	37%	23%	13%
Cheerios Milk & Cereal Bar	1.4 oz	160	40%	23%	8%
Kellogg's Special K Bar, Cranberry Apple	23 g	90	39%	22%	10%
Kellogg's Special K Bar, Peach-Berries	23 g	90	39%	22%	10%

## Healthy Ala Carte List Less Than 35% Sugar

Product	Serving Size	Calories per serving	% Total Weight Sugar	% Total Calories from Fat	% Calories from Sat. Fat
Chex Mix, Traditional	51 g	210	6%	17%	4%
Sunbelt Granola Bar, Golden Almond	28 g	140	29%	43%	10%
Keebler Journey Bar, Chocolate	1.3 oz	150	30%	30%	9%
Keebler Journey Bar, Apple Cinnamon	1.3 oz	140	30%	19%	3%
Keebler Journey Bar, Caramel	1.3 oz	140	35%	16%	3%
Cookie, Peanut Butter Baker Boy	27 g	130	30%	46%	10%
Cookie, Chocolate Chip Baker Boy	27 g	130	30%	46%	10%
Kellogg's Special K Bar, Blueberry	23 g	90	35%	17%	10%
Nature Valley Granola Bars	42 g	180	26%	30%	
Nature Valley Trail Mix Bars, Fruit & Nut	35 g	140	34%	28%	
Kellogg's Special K Bar, Strawberry	23 g	90	35%	17%	10%
Pretzel Goldfish, Pepperidge Farm	30 g	120	0%	21%	
Sunbelt Granola Bar, Golden Almond	28 g	140	29%	43%	10%
Sunseeds, Dry Roast Salted	28 g	163	0%	77%	8%
Munchies, Frito Lay	28 g	140	4%	43%	6%
String Cheese	1 oz	63	0%	43%	3%

## Extra Healthy Ala Carte List

### Calories From Fat 30% or Less and Less Than 35% Sugar

Product	Serving Size	Calories per serving	% Total Weight Sugar	% Total Calories from Fat	% Calories from Sat. Fat
Pringles, fat-free	28 g	70	0%	0%	0%
Ruffles Wow! All Flavors	28 g	70	0-4%	0%	0%
Pretzels	30 g	120	0%	4%	0%
Pretzel Sticks	30 g	120	0%	8%	0%
Teddy Grahams, Nabisco	30 g	130	27%	28%	
Animal Cookies, Iced Keebler	32	130	28%	23%	
Animal Cookies, Keebler	56 g	260	27%	27%	
Dole Fruit Bowl	113 g	60	21%	0%	0%
Chex Morning Mix	32 g	130	25-28%	24%	
Advantage Edge Bar	57 g	220	32%	18%	
Wheatables, Keebler reduced-fat	31 g	140	13%	25%	
Fudgesicle	2.5 oz	90	25%	10%	0%
Tickles Snack Mix	26 g	100	12%	25%	
Kellogg's Nutri-Grain Bars	1 bar	140	35%	19%	3%
Quaker Chewy Granola Bar Chocolate Chip	28 g	120	32%	29%	11%
Doritos, Baked Nacho Cheese	28 g	120	4%	23%	3%
Baked Lay's Potato Chips	28 g	110	11%	23%	3%
Baked Lays Sour Cream & Onion	28 g	120	11%	23%	3%
Kashi TLC Crackers	30 g	130	17%	30%	
Guiltless Gourmet Corn Chips	28 g	110	0%	14%	
Crackers, Keebler Original Graham	29 g	130	24%	23%	
Crackers, Keebler Chocolate Graham	31 g	140	29%	25%	
Chex Mix, Traditional	51 g	210	6%	17%	4%
Keebler Journey Bar, Chocolate	1.3 oz	150	30%	30%	9%

## Extra Healthy Ala Carte List

### Calories From Fat 30% or Less and Less Than 35% Sugar

Product	Serving Size	Calories per serving	% Total Weight Sugar	% Total Calories from Fat	% Calories from Sat. Fat
Keebler, Journey Bar, Apple Cinnamon	1.3 oz	140	30%	19%	3%
Keebler, Journey Bar, Caramel	1.3 oz	140	35%	16%	3%
Kellogg's Special K Bar, Blueberry	23 g	90	35%	17%	10%
Nature Valley Granola Bars	42 g	180	26%	30%	
Nature Valley Trail Mix Bars, Fruit & Nut	35 g	140	34%	28%	
Kellogg's Special K Bar, Strawberry	23 g	90	35%	17%	10%
Pretzel Goldfish, Pepperidge Farm	30 g	120	0%	21%	
Crackers, Keebler Cinnamon Graham	30 g	130	30%	19%	

## Not So Healthy Ala Carte List

Product	Serving Size	Calories per serving	% Total Weight Sugar	% Total Calories from Fat	% Calories from Sat. Fat
Cookie, Chocolate Chip Rich's	26 g	130	38%	46%	10%
Cookie, M & M Baker Boy	27 g	130	41%	46%	17%
Cookie, Chocolate Chip Home-made	31 g	156	64%	49%	24%
Hi C Fruit Snacks, Brach's	26 g	80	73%	0%	0%
Pizza, Tony's French Bread Multi Cheese	4.18 oz	393	3%	56%	22%
Nachos with Cheese Sauce	2 oz + 2 oz	354		53%	10%
French Fries, Deep-fried	6 oz	534	0%	47%	19%
Popcorn Chicken	100 g	287		59%	14%