

Testimony
Of
Food and Nutrition Services,
Fairfax County Public Schools
Before the
Joint Subcommittee Studying Childhood
Obesity
In Virginia's Public Schools
August 29, 2007

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Good afternoon. I am Penny E. McConnell, MS, RD, SNS, Director, Food and Nutrition Services, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS). I am a registered dietitian and past president of the Virginia Dietetic Association, Virginia School Nutrition Association, and National School Nutrition Association. I have been employed in Food and Nutrition Services, Fairfax County Public Schools for forty-two years.

The FCPS School Board expects Food and Nutrition Services to remain financially solvent while operating under our strong nutrition philosophy “we talk, serve, and teach nutrition.” We do not jeopardize nutrition for the bottom line. However, it is getting very difficult to make ends meet with insufficient federal and state funding for school meals and rising labor, benefits, and food costs.

USDA defines competitive or a la carte foods as “any foods offered in schools, healthy as well as less healthy, except school meals.”

In 1979 USDA published its list of Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value:

1. Soda water.
2. Frozen desserts—non fruit ices, nonfruit sherbets, and water ices that contain less than 50 percent full-strength juice.
3. Certain candies—hard candy, jellies and gum, marshmallow candies, fondant, licorice, spun candy, and candy-coated popcorn.

Virginia’s competitive food regulations for nonmenu items state they must contain 5% of one of eight specified nutrients per serving – protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A, vitamin C, riboflavin, thiamine, and niacin.

<u>USRDA</u>	<u>Nutrient</u>	<u>Five Percent</u>
65.0 gm.	Protein	3.250 gm.
5,000.0 I.U.	Vitamin A	250.000 I.U.
60.0 mg.	Vitamin C	3.000 mg.
1.5 mg.	Thiamine	.075 mg.
1.7 mg.	Riboflavin	.085 mg.
20.0 mg.	Niacin	1.000 mg.
1.0 gm.	Calcium	.050 gm.
18.0 mg.	Iron	.900 mg.

These guidelines are out of date and need revision so they reflect current research.

Since 1986, Fairfax County Public Schools has had competitive food regulations that preclude the sale of competitive foods during the school day. These are stronger than both federal and state regulations. **Attachments:** Regulations 7204.3 (Food Sales in School) and Regulation 7205.2 (Food Sales – Vending Machines).

Regulation 7204.3 – Food Sales in School:

“In order to help students establish sound nutritional habits, to assure that sanitary food practices are maintained, and to preserve a sound financial status in each school food service program:

- A. No food or beverages will be offered for sale to students before or during the scheduled school day on the school premises by other than an individual school’s food service program.
- B. No school or organization will contract for or offer on its own at other times any sale of food or beverage to students in competition with an established Office of Food and Nutrition Services program.”

Regulation 7205.2 – Food Sales – Vending Machines states:

- “Vending Machines are Available to Students During the School Day:
Vending machines located in the dining rooms and dispensing nutritious food or beverages to students shall be authorized in schools at the discretion of the school principal provided the vending program is operated by the Office of Food and Nutrition Services. Profits shall accrue to the Food and Nutrition Services Fund.
- Vending Machines Available in School Lounges and After School:
Vending machine procurement and management of machines located in other areas of the school, to include financial management and product selection, shall be the responsibility of the director, Office of Food and Nutrition Services. The vending program requirements of individual schools shall be arranged through the cooperative planning efforts of the director, Office of Food and Nutrition Services, and the school principal. The net profits from these machines shall be divided equally between the school and the Food and Nutrition Services Fund.”

To maintain the nutritional integrity of the program and to preclude the potential for a non-compliance situation during the school day Food and Nutrition Services oversees the vending programs. We operate the largest school food service vending program in the country. This is not common and generally school administrators oversee the vending in their schools and control all revenue.

Our new program has two types of vending.

1. **Middle/High School Dining Room Vending:**

The dining room vending machines operate during meal service and contain the same a la carte items that are available on the serving lines. These machines serve as auxiliary serving lines in our crowded schools and offer nutritious items students can purchase as a supplement to their lunch. Beverage machines vend milk, 100% fruit juice and water. Snack machines offer yogurt, cereal/milk, fresh fruit and vegetables, etc. **Attachment** (Combi Vending Machine Plan-o-gram).

2. **Vending Machines Available in School Lounges and After School:**

Vending machines located in other parts of the schools are only open after the school day for students and adults attending after school activities. The net profits from after school vending are shared with school activity sponsors. The advantages of this partnership include compliance with local/state/federal regulations; nutritious choices during the school day; services to student and adults after school; better accountability; increased revenue and employment for personnel.

The key to tackling childhood overweight is a strong partnership between schools, parents, students, community groups and industry. The FCPS Wellness Policy, a living document focuses on the whole child, school communities' needs, and the school day. Food and Nutrition Services plays a major role in supporting the mission of the schools by providing nutrition information to students, parents, teachers and nutrition education in the classroom. We have developed a variety of topics such as Kids Cooking, E-Z Bear Exercise Pyramid and our Nutrition Calculator. This Smart Snack activity focuses on serving sizes; the Nutrition Facts food label; and sound nutrient standards which assist students and parents in evaluating their snacks. The nutrition calculator can be found on the Energy Zone web site at: <http://www.fcps.edu/fsapps/fnscalculator/EZCalculator.cfm>.

The nutrition standards incorporated in this tool are:

- Virginia Governor's Nutrition Standards (January 2005) and
- Institute of Medicine (IOM) report from the Committee on Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools (April 2007).

Unlike the Governor's nutrition standards that address percentage of calories from fat, saturated fat, sugar and calories the IOM report included trans fat and sodium recommendations. These are included in our calculator (Nutrition Calculator).

The (IOM) Committee recognizes it would be difficult to regulate items sold at after school events involving student and adults.

Federal restrictions on competitive foods are limited but concern with childhood obesity and the federal requirement for local wellness policies has brought action across the country. Michele Simones analyzed 25 state Wellness Policies and found a chaotic patchwork quilt of policies that often make no sense and several aren't based on scientific research. These have challenged food service directors to find affordable products that meet these new standards. More important industry cannot customize products for individual states and/or school districts.

Currently the national School Nutrition Association is working to develop uniform nutrition standards for school meals and a la carte items. They will share their recommendations with the United States Department of Agriculture who are expected to unveil revisions to the current National School Meal Patterns and Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value in winter 2008. SNA believes whatever nutrients a child needs for optimum health in VA are the same nutrients a child needs in every other state.

The School Nutrition Association supports Senator Harkin and Representative Lynn Woolsey's "Child Nutrition Promotion and School Lunch Protection Act" which would allow the Secretary of Agriculture to have authority over all foods sold on school campus during the school day.

From my testimony and description of FCPS' a la carte, vending programs and Wellness Policy and potential changes in federal legislation you can see many positive changes are expected in the near future. Hopefully these actions will support the restriction of the sale of foods of minimal nutritional value before and during the entire school day. As legislators, educators and health professionals we have the responsibility to provide healthy environments in our schools and to focus on the long-term wellness of our children.

I thank you for your attention and interest. I would be happy to answer any questions.