



Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools Fact Sheet for Parents



Your school has chosen to follow the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods. By following these standards, your school will earn extra money to help buy healthier foods. This fact sheet will tell you more about these standards and how they benefit your child.

What are competitive foods?

Competitive foods are foods and beverages in schools that are not part of the federally reimbursed school lunch or breakfast meals. They include a la carte food or beverages from the school cafeteria (sold separate from the school lunch or breakfast meal), vending, fundraisers, school stores, classroom parties, or food rewards.

Why does my school need nutrition standards for competitive foods?

All schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program are required by law to have nutrition standards to help promote good health and prevent obesity. Many children eat too much junk food and not enough fruits, vegetables, milk, and whole grains. More children are becoming overweight or getting diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes that may be partly caused by poor eating. Schools can help keep children healthier by offering and promoting nutritious foods in schools.

How will the PDE Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods benefit my child?

The PDE Standards will make it easier and more appealing for your child to choose healthy foods. Children who eat well are healthier and do better in school. Your school will offer and promote more fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lower fat milk and dairy foods. Your school will decrease foods and beverages that are high in calories from fat and sugar, and oversized portions.

Will soda (pop), candy, cookies, chips and other treats still be offered or sold in schools?

Your school may still choose to offer or sell some types of cookies, candy, and chips. They may not offer or sell soda, chewing gum, and certain types of candies during the school day. Healthier foods should always be available and promoted as an alternative.

Can we still bring in treats for birthdays and other celebrations?

Check with your school before providing treats. Most schools will only allow treats on certain days when parties are scheduled. Parties may include up to three treats with sugar as the first ingredient. But, the parties must also include fresh fruits and vegetables and water, milk or 100% juice to drink. In some schools, the school food service can help provide these items for a small fee. Soda or “pop” is not allowed at parties.

Do the standards affect foods sold at sporting events, fundraisers, or other after school activities?

The PDE Standards only apply to foods and beverages on the school grounds during the school day. However, we still encourage healthier items at after school events. Check your school’s policy about after-school events, because your school may have a stricter policy.

Do the standards affect the lunches or snacks that we pack for our children?

PDE encourages students to participate in the school meals. If your child(ren) choose(s) to pack, try to provide a healthy lunch with foods like whole grains, fruits, vegetables and low fat dairy products. However, the standards do not affect any lunches or snacks that you provide for your child only.

What can parents do to help?

Check your school’s policy before providing foods or beverages to the school students. This will help your school follow required policies. Also, some students may have serious food allergies.

How can I get more information?

Go to the PDE Food and Nutrition Website www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition/. Click on the link that says “School Nutrition Incentive.” You will be able to view the nutrition standards document, and other information such as handouts for parents on classroom parties and healthy snacks.