

## The Impact of Legislation for School Nutrition Policy

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*Abstract:* State and federal legislation required school districts to develop nutrition and physical activity policies. To assess the impact of this legislation, we visited 64 WA middle schools from 28 districts during the 2007-2008 school year to collect data on: 1) quality of the district policy, 2) availability of foods and drinks in schools, and 2) student consumption of beverages and snacks. District nutrition policies had considerable room for improvement compared to national guidelines. During the middle school visits data were collected for >3500 beverages and foods. The nutritional quality of the foods and beverages sold outside of school meal programs (competitive foods) was compared to both rigorous national guidelines and the nutrition goals established by WA Senate Bill 5093. Most competitive snack foods failed to meet rigorous national standards and many failed to meet the goals of WA legislation. In many schools however, there were several snacks that did meet nutrition goals. In the 64 middle schools, over 10,000 7th graders completed a self-administered Beverage and Snack Questionnaire. On average, students have about 1 sugar sweetened beverage (SSB) and 1 ½ unhealthy snacks per day while they are at school. About ¼ of the total unhealthy beverages students consume each week are consumed at school. Policies made a difference; schools in districts with strong SSB policies had fewer SSB available to students at school. The school food environment matters; the availability of SSB and unhealthy snacks in schools was a significant predictor of student consumption of these items. Improving school nutrition environments through policy change is an effective way to improve the diets of adolescents.