



Healthy School Food
M A R Y L A N D

Sensible Sugar in Schools Act

HealthySchoolFoodMD.org

Background

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends that children ages **4-8 consume no more than 3 teaspoons** and **pre-teens and teenagers consume no more than 5-8 teaspoons of added sugar daily**. Sugar consumption is correlated with increased rates of diabetes, as well as obesity, which contributes to numerous health problems, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, cancer, gallbladder disease and gallstones, osteoarthritis, gout, sleep apnea and asthma. Currently, **26% of Maryland's high school students are overweight or obese** (CDC, 2013).



Obesity during adolescence has been shown to cause lifetime increases in rates of cardiovascular disease and adverse psychosocial consequences for women, including completion of fewer years of education, higher rates of poverty and lower rates of household income. In addition, a growing body of research suggests that **obesity is associated with poorer academic performance** beginning as early as kindergarten. USDA regulations mandate that competitive foods sold in schools (foods sold outside of federally reimbursable meals) contain no more than 35% sugar by weight. However, **there is no limit on sugar in foods sold as part of federally reimbursable meals**, and when you combine several food items containing sugar sold in schools, you can quickly surpass AHA recommendations on added sugar. For example, a typical breakfast in many Maryland counties (and used in the breakfast in the classroom program) consisting of a **cinnamon roll and chocolate milk** (to which fruit and juice may be added) contains **21 grams of added sugar, or 5 teaspoons**. Or, a child buying a reimbursable lunch with a chocolate milk who then purchases a cookie or an ice cream a la carte could easily surpass these recommended maximum levels of added sugar.

Purpose of the Bill

- This bill would require school districts to come up with a plan for reducing added sugar intake per meal period for any child based on the recommendations of the American Heart Association.
- School districts would be required to solicit the input of the general public, including any interested stakeholders, such as parents, students, educators, medical professionals and non-profit organizations, to formulate this plan.
- Plans would be required to be opened up for public comment for an appropriate period of time and publicized to parents.

Benefits to Our Children and Families

- Many parents trust that schools are providing their children with healthy meals but do not realize the amount of sugar that children have access to at school. This would help parents reduce the amount of sugar that their children are consuming overall.
- Parents would participate in the process of developing these regulations for their districts, thereby maintaining local control while addressing an issue of concern.
- 44% of Maryland's public school children are eligible for Free or Reduced-price Meals. These children eat up to 3 meals a day at school, including breakfast, lunch and suppers provided with after-school programming. Reducing sugar in school food will have a significant positive impact on the health of these most vulnerable children.

Benefits to Maryland's Economy

- If the Body Mass Index of Marylanders was lowered by 5 percent, Maryland could save 7.6% in health care costs, which would equate to savings of \$13,836,000,000 by 2030.
- The number of Maryland residents who could be spared from developing new cases of major obesity-related diseases includes:
 - 158,413 people could be spared from type 2 diabetes,
 - 129,330 from coronary heart disease and stroke,
 - 126,707 from hypertension,
 - 70,406 from arthritis, and
 - 10,841 from obesity-related cancer.

Responses to Potential Criticism

- *This might result in students not getting needed nutrients.* **Response:** Each district will have the flexibility to create a plan to meet these guidelines without sacrificing important nutrients. This will include the participation of dietitians and food service professionals who can address this issue. Some simple ways that school systems can approach reducing sugar intake without sacrificing nutrients include a one sweet only per meal rule, limiting sales of sugary a la carte items, limiting use of sugary breakfast items, or only serving white milk with sugary breakfast items.
- *School districts don't know how much sugar is added to products because it is not listed on the nutrient facts label, only total sugar.* **Response:** It is usually easy to deduce the amount of added sugar by looking at the ingredient list or comparing to a plain-flavored item from the same company (e.g., plain versus flavored yogurt). Healthy School Food Maryland will also provide a list of added sugars in common school food items. In addition, the FDA has recommended adding a line for added sugars on nutrient labels, so soon this will make the task much easier. In the meantime, the committees can take this into account to find workable solutions.

Healthy School Food Maryland coalition partners:

Brickyard Educational Farm
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Coalition Halting Obesity in Children Everywhere (CHOICE)
Crossroads Community Food Network
Glen Haven Elementary School PTA
GrowingSoul
Healthy Kinder, Inc.
Maryland Association for Health, Physical Education,
Recreation and Dance
Maryland Environmental Health Network

Maryland Public Health Association
Montgomery County Food Council
Montgomery Victory Gardens
Prince George's County Food Equity Council
Real Food for Kids - Montgomery
Safe Grow Montgomery
Student Section of the Maryland Public Health
Association
UMB Center for Integrative Medicine, Food and
Community Health Program
Young Activist Club