



Healthy School Food

M A R Y L A N D

Public Schools – Thirsty Kids Act

HealthySchoolFoodMD.org

Background

Drinking water throughout the day is one of the healthiest habits that we can encourage in our children. Staying hydrated during the school day and even during school lunch can be a challenge, as **water may only be accessible through one water fountain, which may be outside the cafeteria and require permission to visit.** Additionally, water bottles may not be allowed to be used in class or taken from class to class. In most Maryland schools, students have to pay to buy a bottle of water with their lunch. Cups are usually not supplied without a doctor's note, so students have to choose between paying for a bottle of water, selecting another drink, like juice or chocolate milk (which come free with their meal) or buying sugar-sweetened beverages such as sports drinks and sugar-added juice available in vending machines that are on during the school day. The Institute of Medicine attributes 20% of the nation's weight increase between 1977 and 2007 to consumption of sugary drinks, including regular soda, sugar-added juices, flavored waters and teas, sports drinks, and energy drinks (Institute of Medicine, 2012). **Drinking just one 8-oz sugary drink per day increases a child's odds of becoming obese by 60%** (Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, 2012). Sugary drinks contribute more calories and added sugars to our diets than any other food or beverage and daily consumption is strongly linked to higher childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes rates (Institute of Medicine, 2012). In light of these numbers, it is imperative that we encourage a water-drinking culture among Maryland's children.



Purpose of the Bill

- This bill would require schools to offer free, unlimited water to children in school cafeterias.
- All schools in the state would be required to put a reusable water bottle on its supply lists for every child in every grade.
- School districts would be encouraged to develop a plan to promote the use of water bottles, a culture of drinking water and weekly cleaning of water bottles.
- Schools would be required to provide flat-bottomed, biodegradable cups from which to drink water in the cafeteria or any other location in which meals are served.

Benefits to Our Children and Families

- Parents will not have to worry about the cost of their child buying a bottle of water with their lunch each day. With cups available in the cafeteria, students will have access to free drinking water with each meal.
- Children will become accustomed to drinking water rather than sweet beverages, which will help shape good habits for a lifetime.
- Children will experience the health benefits of drinking water regularly, including the maintenance of the balance of body fluids, energizing their muscles, keeping their kidneys healthy, and much more.

Responses to Potential Criticism

- *Providing cups for students is too expensive.* **Response:** Schools that are struggling with the expense of cups will be able to reduce this cost by encouraging their teachers and staff to promote the use of reusable water bottles. They could also work with businesses or the PTA to request donations of cups. The benefits to children of staying hydrated and developing the habit of drinking water justifies the expense of the cups.
- *Buying a reusable water bottle may be an economic hardship for some parents.* **Response:** Any plastic bottle would meet the criteria of a reusable water bottle, and they are abundant and easy to obtain.
- *Asking schools to put water bottles on supply lists is overstepping our bounds.* **Response:** We are trying to strike the right balance between being environmentally responsible, keeping costs to schools low and addressing an identified problem. We have researched all the possible options on how to strike this balance, and this was the best solution available.
- *Students could bring substances other than water in their bottles.* **Response:** Students can already bring illegal substances into school in any number of other ways. Drugs can be easily slipped into pockets, cooked into foodstuffs, or alcohol can be brought in Sprite or Coke bottles. Even without bringing their own reusable water bottles to school, the risk is still there. Schools that are truly concerned about this issue could require that bottles arrive at school empty and be filled at school.
- *Students might spill their drinks during class.* **Response:** In many schools across the state, students are already served breakfast in the classroom, including much messier drinks than water. If it spills, it's only water.

Healthy School Food Maryland coalition partners:

Brickyard Educational Farm
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Coalition Halting Obesity Everywhere in Children
(CHOICE)
Crossroads Community Food Network
First Bites
GrowingSoul
Healthy Kinder, Inc.

Maryland Environmental Health Network
Montgomery County Sustainability Network
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
Young Activist Club