

# Make Food Choices an Easy “A”™

## Tips for School Snacks Messaging

- ✓ Focus on children’s health, the “commonsense” notion of serving kids healthy food, and having “consistency” in the nutrition messages children receive.
- ✓ Be prepared to address concerns about food waste.
- ✓ Counter arguments in favor of giving school districts local control on implementation of standards with a message about how national standards help ensure all kids have access to healthy options and allow flexibility for schools to exceed standards.
- ✓ Emphasize ways schools can raise money by selling healthy or non-food items.
- ✓ For conservative audiences, emphasize connection between health, academics, and, in appropriate communities, military preparedness — “Healthy kids are better learners and they do better in school. Also, when kids are healthy they are more fit, which better prepares them to serve in the military.”

## School Snacks Messages (\*Use key messages consistently and repeatedly)

- ★ Kids eat the majority of their calories at school. So all schools should make sure that all the food and beverages they sell and serve are healthy. This is why consistent nutrition standards are so important.
  - Parents of school-aged children overwhelmingly support nutrition standards for all food and beverages, including snack items, sold and served in school.
  - With more and more kids being diagnosed with diet-related diseases like diabetes, it’s just common sense that all of the food and drink options offered in schools are healthy.
- Kids can learn healthy eating habits in school, and there should be a consistent message about nutrition from classroom to cafeteria to snack bar.
- Schools can sell healthier products or things other than food to bring in revenue. They shouldn’t sell kids junk food.
- When schools serve healthier food and beverages, including snacks, studies have shown that kids continue to purchase the healthier items and schools don’t see a decline in revenue. Many schools find creative ways to get student buy-in for healthier options through taste tests and surveys, so they know they are offering items that kids want.

## Language to Emphasize/Language to Avoid

Messages that resonate best are clear and simple. They use everyday language free of jargon and communicate shared values and emotion. Below you’ll find a list of words/phrases Voices for Healthy Kids encourages you to use (left-hand column) when talking about school snacks. Language in the right-hand column includes terms and phrases not as easily understood or impactful when looking to engage your audience.

Use This Language	Instead of This Language
✓ School snacks	✗ Competitive foods
✓ Nutrition Standards	✗ Nutrition regulations or restrictions
✓ National, USDA (nutrition standards)	✗ Federal (nutrition standards)
✓ Helping kids grow up at a healthy weight	✗ Preventing childhood obesity
✓ Eating healthy and being physically active helps prevent diabetes and heart disease	✗ Eating healthy and being physically active helps prevent childhood obesity

## Tips for Effective Messaging to Support Public Policy Change

- 1 Connect with supporters.**

When communicating to gain support for policy, systems, and environmental changes that help kids grow up at a healthy weight, it is important to use language that will move people to take action. By framing your message in a way that paints a picture of how the current environment makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make healthy choices, you can create a sense of urgency and the need to take action. Make sure to clarify that the change and action you're calling for is about transforming environments to make it easy for people to eat healthy and be physically active and less about creating personal behavior change.
- 2 Use the right words.**

While obesity is a chronic disease, most people still think of it as a personal problem with a personal solution. They believe if someone is obese or overweight, that person just needs to eat less and be more physically active. They don't immediately see the need for public policy solutions. However, when talking about people facing obesity-related diseases like diabetes and heart disease, most people agree that we need to work together to find a solution to the problem. Avoid using "obesity" and instead emphasize the health threats posed by heart disease and/or diabetes.
- 3 Emphasize choice.**

People are most supportive of healthy changes if they don't fear their choices will be limited. When talking about adding healthy options, stress the array of overall choices offered to people, especially parents who we are here to support, so the focus is not on the removal of unhealthy options.
- 4 Use the right messenger.**

Messages are only as strong as the person delivering them. Is the person delivering the message credible? Are they representative of the community most affected? Do they have personal experience related to the issue? Are they respected by the audience? The best messenger needs to be determined for each situation and location. For example, when messaging on health issues, the best messenger could be a doctor, a nurse, or a patient. Make informed decisions about the most culturally appropriate messenger on an issue.
- 5 Stress consumer education as ONE piece of the puzzle.**

People believe education is the best way to encourage behavior change. But helping all children grow up at a healthy weight is a complex challenge and education is only one part of the solution. Reinforce consumer education as key to awareness building about the problem and solutions, but emphasize other initiatives that drive system-wide policy change. For example, with tobacco use, warning labels did a great deal to educate consumers but the change in norms and dramatic drops in smoking rates happened when environmental changes happened like prohibiting the sale to minors and making workplaces smoke-free.
- 6 Alleviate skepticism and build trust.**

People are very skeptical of government and framing our solutions only from that lens can prevent us from getting our message through to key audiences. Introduce policy, systems, and environmental change efforts to the public with words like "services," "resources," "partnerships," as people are more inclined to embrace this terminology instead of "regulations," "mandates," "bans," "funding," and "government."