

Parents Advocating School Accountability  
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## **One school's success: Why soda can be banned**

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San Francisco's Aptos Middle School banished soda sales four months ago. Our "a la carte" student café has since gradually eliminated junk food and replaced it with healthy choices.

Conventional wisdom told us to brace for student rebellion and financial disaster.

Neither happened.

Now a California State Senate bill, SB677 by Sen. Deborah Ortiz (D-Sacramento), would ban soda sales at all schools. Soda lobbyists insist this can't be done. But we at Aptos see firsthand that it can.

Myths from the junk food industry have discouraged schools nationwide from banishing soda. Let's take a hard look.

Myth #1: *"Soda can be part of a balanced diet."*

At 250 calories each, one 20-ounce bottle of soda, as sold in most school vending machines, contains 12.5 percent of the 2,000 daily calories recommended for children ages 7-10. That's one-eighth of a child's calories from a drink with no nutritional value. In fact, soft drinks supply almost one-fourth of the calories consumed by kids ages 2-19, the American Journal of Public Health reports. And children who drink soda drink far less of nutritious beverages such as milk and 100 percent fruit juice.

Soda should be strictly an occasional special treat, not a daily habit.

Myth #2 : *"Bans cost schools vital income."*

School officials who believe they rely on soda income are understandably reluctant to risk eliminating it. But this argument overlooks the fact that thirsty students who cannot buy soda will readily buy healthier beverages – bottled water, 100% fruit juice or milk.

Myth #3 : *"You can lead kids to bottled water, but you can't make them drink it."*

Not true. When Aptos replaced soda in our locker room vending machines with bottled water, sales increased immediately. Research shows that the deciding factor for students choosing

between healthy or unhealthy items is price.

Myth #4 : *"It's about the couch, not the can."*

With this line, the National Soft Drink Association contends that kids need more exercise, not less soda. Yes, kids need more exercise – but soda may put them at higher risk for injuries when they're active. Soda consumption is linked to increased broken bones, obesity and osteoporosis. A Harvard School of Public Health study found that athletic teenage girls who were soda drinkers were three times more likely to break bones than their teammates who shunned carbonated drinks. For cola drinkers, the risk was five times greater, according to the study, published in the June 2000 Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine. For these girls, getting more exercise without cutting out soda could be downright dangerous.

Myth #5: *"Banning soda sales violates kids' right to free choice – and what about adults at schools?"*

Students and teachers are free to choose alternatives such as juice, water, milk or seltzer, or to bring soft drinks from home. Selling soda would be banned, not drinking it.

All talk about the "right to choose" suddenly ceases when districts sign “pouring rights” contracts. These agreements give one company (usually Coke or Pepsi) an exclusive presence on school property, with competitors' products banned. Thus the winning soft drink company actively limits the whole school's "choice" – to its own products.

Myth #6: *"We don't need one-size-fits-all legislation. Let parents and individual schools decide."*

Parents and educators want to decide what kids eat and drink at school, but kids make the actual choice. Parents are undermined when children can spend their school lunch money on soda instead.

And pouring rights soda contracts with school districts can pit principals and parents who don't want soda in their schools against downtown administrators who sign the lucrative contracts.

Activist parents can work to ban soda from schools, but some schools have more activist parents than others. Schools serving lower-income students are often the least likely to have parents with the time, resources and empowerment to fight for children's health against the soda industry's might. That means the most disadvantaged children suffer the worst exploitation from junk food peddlers.

Soda companies' aggressive targeting of schoolchildren reflects the philosophy of Robert Woodruff, Coca-Cola's longtime president, that a Coke should always be "within arm's length of desire."

Children's health advocates simply want sodas farther out of reach when kids are at school.