

Vending machines and their importance in schools



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Vending machines can provide students (and teachers) with nutrition using their favorite snacks mid-day. They should be allowed to remain in schools because they benefit the school and its inhabitants as a whole by bringing in extra income and profits for the school, students don't always have enough time to have a balanced breakfast/lunch or meals in general at home or during school time, so vending machines give a quick option for a needed snack, and lastly nutritious and healthier options can be provided to students and faculty.

Vending machines have been a point of frequent argument for years. Some like their convenience, on the go snacking opportunities, others may think they're a nuisance and only cause problems like trash and obesity. I believe they are a suitable substitution from the usual sit down and eat lunch or breakfast. Even back when I was in middle school, I had to take the last bus home. I remember going to the vending machines and heading to the benches outside to wait with my friends who rode the same bus. Vending machines deserve to stay in schools and while yes, they do make messes, however, they can also bring in extra income for the school. As long as the money is used for the benefit of the faculty and students, vending machines should be allowed to remain.

There is a point to be made that vending machines tend to have more unhealthy rather than healthy options and are regulated and controlled by company suppliers as to what is sold and not sold in the vending machines. Suppliers tend to be associated more toward unhealthy options. One study

done is called “ Profits, Commercial Food Supplier Involvement, and School Vending Machine Snack Food Availability: Implications for Implementing the New Competitive Foods Rule,” which explores the supplier and school district involvements with the vending machines and its profits. “ Profits for the school . . . were associated with increased LNEED availability; company suppliers also were associated with decreased fruit/vegetable availability. Supplier “ say” . . . was associated with increased LNEED availability and decreased fruit/vegetable availability” (Terry-McElrath et al. pg 451). Junk and fatty food is much more profitable for the school as a whole and also the suppliers that push them which is contradicting.

However, the same study showed support towards more school involvement with what is put in the vending machines despite what the profits may be and what suppliers want. The school could even have healthy choices put in if nutrition is an issue. The article further states:

These findings have implications for 3 specific issues related to the implementation process: (1) degree of district involvement; (2) degree of supplier decision-making ability; and (3) consideration of what food items will replace vending machine LNEED foods following . . . new nutrition(sic) standards. This study lends support for increased district involvement . . . given the negative association with LNEED foods and the positive association with fruits and vegetables. (457)

Additionally, as mentioned in the article “ The Importance of Vending Machines.”, by Rodney Sila, it is stated that “ a vending machine helps the organization to increase its sources of income. Because people are

increasingly becoming busier, there has been a rising demand for fast foods”(par 2). Now school administration involvement is argued for better options to be given via vending machines and profits were seen with healthier options while also satisfying the need for on the go snacking options. There is another case observed where a school sought out to receive more of the profits from their vending machines again, rather than a smaller share from the distributor. In the newspaper article “ Lenoir County Schools Examining Vending Contracts”, the author Michael Abernathy states, “ Revenue from drink and snack vending machines on school campuses help offset instructional costs and provide equipment for students and teachers” (Line 1). The school sought to use the money from the machines to improve their schools by buying materials and paying instructors. Seeking out other contracts to find the best deal is the best way to do so. Furthering the point, in the same article, “ Lenoir County Schools Examining Vending Contracts,” the school district itself took the initiative to receive more of the vending profits. “ After years of loose confederations with drink and snack vendors, Lenoir County Schools is hoping to solidify contracts,” says Abernathy, “ with those companies to maximize profits and benefits schools would see.”(Line 3). This could be an example of which profits do help benefit schools heavily and warrant further discussion on the impact they have in the schools. On a separate yet similar note, in the article by the Vancouver Vending Company, the author brings up a valid point in that, “ a vending machine at the school can be used to fundraise, either for the school itself, for student activities, for supplementing hot lunch programs, or even for an external cause, such as a charity”(par 5).

Any profits obtained through the vending machines are a win for schools. The methods through which the profits are obtained, through healthy or unhealthy options, can be argued, but it ultimately comes down to student/faculty choice. Both healthy and unhealthy options should be offered.

As for the next point, the availability and access of vending machines provide students with a more efficient option to get food, snacks, and hydration. And if vending machines aren't providing the students with the wanted sources of nutrition an additional snack bar can be added with purely healthful options. In the article "How Can We . . ." written by Katherine W Bauer et al., the study conducted in the article strived to find the different factors affecting students nutritional choices and the effects of these factors on their physical activity. The groups questioned were all inhabitants of two different public middle schools, students and faculty alike. In the study, it was found that the different environmental factors, school policies, meal timing, and peer pressure were all factors in students' reduced physical activity as well as an increase in the constant selection of junk foods, sodas, and other non-nutritional vending items. Students would prefer to purchase vending items as they were more accessible and convenient than school lunches and breakfasts. The results from the study examined the policies and health initiatives that were already put in place but also suggested that even when schools have these programs the overall environment and societal pressures should be taken into account also to have successful results from the healthy, nutritional programs. Results from the study show, "Recommendations to improve nutrition opportunities around school

included increasing the fruit and vegetable options sold in the cafeteria, decreasing the nonnutritious(sic) snack(sic) and beverages sold in school, and increasing time for the lunch period”(pg 44).

The issues pointed out in the article are very valid. The more nutritional options should be advertised and provided to students instead of just the usual unhealthy versions. The authors stated that “ students and staff described several overwhelming barriers to healthful nutrition: (1) poor quality and palatability of food served in the cafeteria; (2) presence of snack carts and vending machines that serve nonnutritious(sic) foods; (3) the short time schools allow for lunch period; and (4) student dieting, weight concerns, and weight-related teasing”(40). While the food provided to students is the best option, in terms of having a full decent meal, but the snacking option is more and more enticing for students. I can agree that full meals are better than just snacking.

The availability, convenience, and usage of vending machines in this particular case are essential. Vending machines are utilized by students more and more, therefore they should remain. They provide an option to students instead of the standard lunch or breakfast. Time is limited in the mornings and also at lunchtime, so the easy and quick option is the better choice for students. Also in the article Bauer et al. writes when interviewing a student, “ One student explained, ‘ Everyone is like “ Eat your food at lunch” and I’m like, “ I don’t have time.” Some people don’t even eat their lunch; they just take snacks and stuff, so everyone finishes in like 5 minutes, and then they come out talking and stuff. So it’s even worse than eating actual lunch . . . just snacks’ ”(qtd in Bauer et al. pg 41). Students may not like

what is being served in the afternoon for lunch. The looks and taste of the food may be a hindrance as well. In a quote on page 40 of the article, it is stated:

The most frequently cited barrier to healthful nutrition by both students and staff was the quality of the foods served. Many criticized the food offered in the cafeteria as greasy and high in fat. Both students and staff felt there was a lack of healthy options and would prefer to have more fruits and vegetables available. The students said that if the cafeteria offered fruits and vegetables in greater quantity and quality, they would choose to eat them instead of the less nutritious entrees or snack foods. (40)

Timing and quality of the lunch and breakfast food are valid points on why students choose the easier to access and to consume options. It all comes down to the student's choice in their habits and also on how to deal with the different obstacles they may face. More nutritional options should be incentivized, but it is also mentioned in the article that " Although some of the staff members felt that students would not eat the healthy foods even if they were available, the majority of the students said they would choose nutritious foods over the snacks at lunchtime if they were more readily accessible and palatable" (41). This alone should give credence to providing healthy snacks for students to just pick up and go. The policies already in place were not enough to provide the healthy results sought out by the administration. " Middle schools participating in our study had a variety of programs and policies in place to promote healthful nutrition and physical activity," says Bauer et al., " However, our findings indicate that there are also numerous competing pressures and barriers . . . that compromise these

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same programs and policies” (45). Finding a balance and looking at the current school’s environmental shape will help to create a way to improve students’ health. If students are self-conscious about their weight or physical abilities provide more incentives for them. If they prefer vending machines over the meals, whether that is due to its quality or time to consume the meal, maybe make more packable on the go meals for students.

Now, to clarify, environmental factors, pressure, timing, etc all have a part in students’ dietary and nutritional choices. However removing vending machines would not solve or even help the problem, it could add another problem in eliminating a student’s choice and only the opportunity to receive some sort of snack during the day. Time is spread thin and adding other choices for students to partake may be an even more helpful factor.

Lastly, Including more nutrient-rich products, adjusting the pricing economy for food served can be helpful to the school place. But offering healthy options for a price may have an adverse effect. The authors of the article “Healthier Snacks...” contend that when half of the vending machine products are substituted with more nutritious options, this, in turn, emits an overall profit decrease in the vending machines(Callaghan et al. 191). According to the authors, students said they would have favored more nutritious options as in more nutritional essentials without the pricing ceiling(191). However, these options offered are harder to maintain so a cooling machine will have to be in place to provide these foods in a vending format. Cost and funding for unhealthy foods should be increased and the prices for healthier foods should be decreased, based on the study done, this method can be a viable plan to balance the food options (French 843s). This pricing procedure is

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proven to be beneficial and works with a long term goal to achieve overall nutrition improvement for schools and workplaces because these environments can be controlled. While there is an associated decrease in revenue from vending machines and it can even be argued that it'll hurt the sales. As demonstrated in the articles above, simply offering healthy snacks in vending machines is not the only solution. Students would still choose the high fat/lower energy snacks available, which could be attributed to the price ceiling of the healthier snacks. Environmental factors, setting, and the time of which eating is allowed will still play a big part in the choosing of which avenue to take, resulting in snack machines still be chosen.

In the article “ Pricing Effects on Food Choices”, the point that adjusting or possibly removing prices for healthier foods can improve consumers’ nutritional choices. In a more controlled environment, this plan can be more achievable by demonstrating control over the number of food choices while not completely removing the food options but just affecting pricing and ease of availability. For example, in the passage from page 843s above it is said that this option is possible “ financially feasible as a long-term strategy to promote healthful food choices”(843s). Choosing this option to balance more towards the nutritious options can limit the purchase of the less nutritious, which is a viable strategy. “ When food or money is scarce, people do not have the luxury of choice,” states Marion Nestle, “ for much of the world’s population, the first consideration is getting enough food to meet biological needs for energy and nutrients” (“ Food Politics . . . ” 671-672). Because of this fact, adjusting the pricing economy for foods and snacks served in the schools can help better prioritize healthier options. As cited in

the newspaper article, “ Healthier Snacks in School Vending Machines: A Pilot Project in Four Ontario High Schools” prices can be a major pain point or obstacle for providing healthier snacks, but providing a healthy food(s) option in a snack bar could be a more viable option. And just as the passage from page 191 states that “ price, value, and taste were cited as major barriers to purchasing the healthier choices from the vending machines”(191). therefore this may heavily affect purchasing choices. However offering vegetables or fruit which can't be sold in vending machines, via a snack bar option would help steer students towards healthier options without having to pay for those items and possibly limit consumption on the less nutritious items offered in the vending machines.

To conclude this paper, vending machines should remain in schools because of the extra revenue they provide, the variation they could provide for students and faculty, and the possibility that nutritional options can be capitalized upon for the health benefits of students. Their complete removal is an excessive solution but tweaking to the items offered, the pricing, and accessibility can reveal fixes or loopholes in some of the cases presented to find healthy items.

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