

May 2013

## Promoting Healthy School Snacks for Children: Opinion Editorial Text

### Write to Your Local Newspapers in Support of Healthy School Meals and Snacks for Children

AAP, along with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts and other public health partners, is working to raise awareness about the need for healthy school meals and snacks before the school year winds to a close this spring. At the beginning of the school year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) implemented new minimum standards for school lunches requiring meals served in schools to meet basic nutritional standards to help keep children healthy. Since then, USDA has also begun updating the 30-year-old nutrition guidelines for snacks and drinks sold in vending machines, snack bars, school stores, and a la carte lines.

As a pediatrician, your role counseling parents about how to foster healthy habits as a family is a crucial component of the fight against childhood obesity. On the heels of new federal nutrition standards for school meals and snacks, now is an opportune time to amplify your clinical work and highlight the importance of healthy school snacks in local media outlets through opinion editorials (op-ed).

### Writing your op-ed

Opinion editorials (op-eds) are an effective medium to communicate your opinion about a timely issue in a local or national media outlet. Op-eds are typically 500-600 words in length, though it is always important to check with the individual publication for specific length requirements (most have guidelines listed on their websites). **Read op-eds recently published by AAP leadership on the “AAP in the News” Resource page** of [FederalAdvocacy.aap.org](http://FederalAdvocacy.aap.org) and in the resource box at the end of this document.

Below is suggested language to include in a draft op-ed to submit to your local newspaper. The AAP strongly recommends that you add in personal stories from your own pediatric practice—it is important to make your submission unique, so the language below should be considered simply as a starting point. If you are comfortable using the message below in your op-ed, please mention your Academy title and membership affiliation in your signature.

### Submitting your op-ed

The [Media Outreach Center](http://MediaOutreachCenter.FederalAdvocacy.aap.org) on [FederalAdvocacy.aap.org](http://FederalAdvocacy.aap.org) allows you to search for and contact your local newspapers directly by Zip code. You can either contact the publication with the information provided, or go to the website of your local paper for specific op-ed length requirements and guidelines.

**Please note that many op-eds are considered “exclusive;” you can only submit your piece to one newspaper at a time.** Should one publication decline to publish your piece, you can resubmit to another, but you should avoid sending your op-ed to several newspapers at once. Most publications will tell you within 1-2 days if they plan to publish your piece.

Please contact Jamie Poslosky [jposlosky@aap.org](mailto:jposlosky@aap.org) in the AAP Department of Federal Affairs for assistance writing and submitting your op-ed

**Op-ed sample text** *(Feel free to include personal stories, state-specific data, and any other content you see fit)*

**Suggested title: Healthier School Snacks, Healthier Kids**

As a pediatrician, I often counsel families about the importance of healthy, active living. I encourage them to eat colorful, nutritious meals together, and to put down the television, phone or computer screen to spend time doing physical activities. Unfortunately, these good habits at home aren't enough to keep children healthy.

As we approach the end of the school year, it's important to realize that students in **{insert city}** aren't just consuming knowledge in the classroom—they're also consuming calories from school meals and vending machines. In fact, many students consume up to half of their daily calories at school. Before summer sets in and meals become less structured, it's important to instill healthy eating habits in children.

Luckily, there are new federal guidelines to help make sure meals and snacks sold in schools are nutritious for children. At the beginning of the school year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) implemented new nutrition standards for school lunches, and currently, USDA is updating 30-year-old nutrition guidelines for snacks and drinks sold in vending machines, snack bars, school stores, and a la carte lines.

These two guidelines will work hand-in-hand to improve students' health. because the high-fat, high-calorie, high-sugar snacks available in vending machines can easily undo all the progress being made at the lunch counter. A healthy lunch of grilled chicken and vegetables doesn't do much good when it's washed down with a candy bar and sugary soda from the snack bar.

This is not a one-size-fits-all approach. The meal and snack standards were wisely designed to let local school districts adapt them to fit the particular needs of our students, so long as the choices meet the nutritional criteria. States will also have the opportunity to weigh in other sources of snacks and beverages in schools not covered by the proposed standards, like fundraisers and concessions at sporting events.

**{x number}** of children in **{x city}** are overweight or obese. *[If you have obe, include personal advice or about healthy eating/snacking that you give to your patients or their parents. Perhaps suggest tactics to encourage healthier eating.]* As a pediatrician, I can't help turn the tide on childhood obesity alone. It will take all of us who care for children—pediatricians, parents and teachers alike—to help make sure that children have healthier choices for snacks and meals. The best place to start is where children spend most of their time: at school.

**Data to use when personalizing your op-ed:**

- [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation \(RWJF\) resources on competitive foods](#)
- [Pew and RWJF Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project: Snack and a la Carte Foods and Beverages](#)
- [Healthy Eating Research/Bridging the Gap report: Influence of Competitive Food and Beverage Policies on Children's Diets and Childhood Obesity](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention childhood obesity facts](#) and childhood obesity [state snapshots](#) from the Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative

Sample published op-eds on healthy school snacks:

- [No More Excuses - School Food Must be Good Food](#)
- [Viewpoints: Schools need to help kids eat healthy](#)
- [Midlands Voices: Help students choose healthful snacks](#)
- [It's time for healthier snacks and beverages in our schools](#)