

## Dairy Nutrition & Wellness Solutions

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## Position Statement: Dairy Foods and School Nutrition Standards

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The National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine, an advisor to the federal government on scientific and technical matters, has recommended that nutrition standards be established for all foods served in schools. The School Nutrition Association (SNA) supports efforts to provide the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture with the authority to regulate the sale of all food sold or made available in school during the school day. National nutrition standards based upon the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGA) could help improve the school food environment and promote healthy diets. Dairy foods provide an important contribution to healthy diets and are one of the "food groups to encourage" in the DGA.

Schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program are subject to uniform national nutrition standards for school meals established by USDA. The question at hand is whether to extend uniform nutrition standards in schools beyond the lunchroom. Reducing the availability of high calorie, low nutrient foods that compete with cafeteria meals in schools – so-called "competitive foods" – and replacing them with nutrient-rich foods would have a positive impact on children's health.

Such an approach is consistent with the *DGA* which recommends increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or fat-free milk products.<sup>1</sup> These foods are good sources of the "nutrients of concern" that are low in the diets of children – calcium, potassium, magnesium, fiber and vitamin E. A uniform nutrition standard that is based upon the *DGA* should encourage increased consumption of these nutritious foods.

### Rationale

The *DGA* recommend children age nine and older consume three servings of low-fat or fat-free milk or milk products each day.<sup>2</sup> Research shows that children who consume recommended amounts of dairy foods have better overall nutrient intakes.<sup>3</sup> Milk, yogurt and cheese together provide nine essential nutrients children need every day, including calcium, protein, potassium, phosphorous, vitamins A, D and B-12, riboflavin and niacin.

In developing uniform nutrition standards, it will be important to evaluate a food based upon its complete package of nutrients rather than simply on single nutrients or absence of certain “nutrients to avoid.” Evaluating foods based on nutrient density will help ensure that children meet their daily nutrient needs within caloric needs. Nutrient dense foods are those foods that provide substantial amounts of vitamins and minerals and relatively few calories.<sup>4</sup>

Establishment of uniform nutrition standards for competitive foods in schools should be guided by the following principles:

- Offer a variety of healthy foods that appeal to children;
- Evaluate foods based on the overall nutritional quality using parameters that are of importance to children’s growth and development;
- Offer foods like fruits and vegetables, whole grain foods, low-fat and fat-free dairy foods, and beverages like 100% fruit juice, water, low-fat or fat-free white and flavored milk in preference over foods and drinks of minimal nutritional value in school vending machines;
- Encourage adequate nutritional intakes and consumption of nutrient-dense foods, especially those nutrients in which children’s intakes are often low (calcium, potassium, magnesium, fiber and vitamin E).

### Healthy Dairy Vending

With kids spending more than half their day in school, it’s important that they get the nutrients they need while they are there. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends offerings such as low-fat white or flavored milk, real fruit juice or water be provided in preference over sweetened soft drinks in school vending.<sup>5</sup> Milk, yogurt and yogurt drinks are excellent nutrient-rich alternatives to typical vending machine offerings. Natural cheeses, like mozzarella string cheese, also provide students with a tasty, nutrient-rich option.

### Flavored Milk: An Important Nutrient-Rich Choice

The DGA note that small amounts of sugar added to nutrient-dense foods, such as reduced fat milk products, may increase intake of such products by enhancing their palatability, thus improving nutrient intake without contributing excessive calories.<sup>6</sup> Flavored milks are nutrient-rich, providing the same nutrients and benefits as unflavored milk. Both contain a high proportion of essential nutrients in relation to their calorie content. Children who consume flavored milk have higher calcium intakes, but similar total fat and added sugar intakes as children who do not drink flavored milk.<sup>7</sup>

### New Look of School Milk Boosts Milk Intake

Nearly four out of five children do not meet their recommended three servings of dairy a day.<sup>8</sup> Research by the National Dairy Council (NDC), in conjunction with the School Nutrition Association,



demonstrates that children drink more milk when schools offer it in plastic, re-sealable containers in different sizes, various flavors, merchandizing locations (vending and a la carte) and ice-cold refrigeration.<sup>9</sup> NDC’s *New Look of School Milk* has helped boost milk consumption in thousands of schools across the country through these improvements, thereby increasing student participation in the National School Lunch Program.

### Conclusion

Uniform nutrition standards designed to discourage consumption of low-nutrient foods and encourage intake of nutrient-rich foods could improve children’s health and provide a more consistent nutrition education message to the nation’s school-age children. Standards that utilize the science-based recommendations embodied in the DGA will best ensure the proper role for milk and milk products.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005 [6th Edition]. [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> AAP Policy Statement: Soft Drinks in Schools. *Pediatrics*, 2004; 113(1): 152-154.

<sup>6</sup> Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005 [6th Edition]. [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines).

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, et al. The nutritional consequences of flavored milk consumption by school-aged children and adolescents in the United States. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 2002; 102(6): 853-856.

<sup>8</sup> National Dairy Council, unpublished data based on the National Health and Nutrition Survey (NHANES), 1999-2002.

<sup>9</sup> National Dairy Council and American School Food Service Association. The School Milk Pilot Test. Beverage Marketing Corporation for NDC and ASFSA, 2002. [www.nationaldairycouncil.org](http://www.nationaldairycouncil.org).