

## Banning Soda In Schools Has Little Impact



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State laws banning the sale of soda but not of other sweetened drinks in schools have had almost no impact on students' consumption of sugary drinks. The study, which was published in the [Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine](#), considered some 7,000 public middle-school students in 40 states and found a result that does not seem too surprising, if you've observed the eating habits and general disdain for nutrition of many an adolescent. While sodas were no longer for sale in vending machines in schools, other sweetened drinks (such as sports drinks and sweetened fruit drinks) were still available, and students simply chose those.

In fact, students in the states with the laws banning soda still consumed the same amount of sugary drinks as students in states without the laws.

Furthermore, while laws that banned all sugary drinks in schools resulted in students having (obviously) less access to them, students' consumption of such drinks remained the same. That is, bans on soft drinks in schools did not influence students' consumption of such drinks as a whole at all.

The middle-school students in the study were followed from 2004 – 2007, about the same time that [many states starting enacting laws banning soft drinks in public schools](#).

With obesity on the rise and teenagers getting about 15 percent of their daily calories from beverages, health groups like the Institute of Medicine have pushed for the removal of all sweetened beverages from schools, and some states have put in place all-out bans on sweetened drinks. California, for example, became the first state

to ban the sale of soft drinks in grade schools, in 2003, and one city, Boston, moved earlier this year to forbid the sale and promotion of sugar-sweetened beverages and sodas on all city property.

But the sale of soft drinks in schools has become a lucrative revenue source for many school districts, and a number of states have been reluctant to eliminate them from schools. Some states have instituted only partial bans that remove sodas from schools but not Snapple, Gatorade and other sugary drinks.

Schools may not be quite as on board about getting kids not to drink sugary drinks as they might say they are.

Despite these limited results from the bans on soft drinks, Daniel R. Taber, an author of the study and postdoctoral research associate at the University of Illinois at Chicago, points out that the study shows that such laws “need to be comprehensive to have any positive effect at all.” With the laws, students do have reduced access to sugary drinks while in school.

One unintended consequence of the ban on soft drinks could be, though, that students could presume that the other sugary drinks are healthy. Says Taber:

“...there’s a lot of misconceptions about which beverages are healthy. Many kids think beverages like Gatorade are a healthy alternative to soda.”

Taber’s comment is revealing. Laws aside, what students need to make healthier choices is a better understanding of what’s in those colorful cans in the vending machines and why, ultimately, they’re not doing themselves any favors by drinking sugary stuff and not getting a taste for good old-fashioned water. Just because a label says “fruit” or “naturally sweetened” doesn’t mean the drink is healthy (let alone nature). But will students just roll their eyes on hearing about the additives and who knows what in those shiny cans?

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