

# **Massachusetts A La Carte Food & Beverage Standards to Promote a Healthier School Environment**



**Revised September 2008**

## **Action for Healthy Kids**

**Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK)** is a nationwide initiative dedicated to creating healthy school environments by advancing sound nutrition and physical activity practices in schools across the country. This effort represents a response to our nation’s epidemic of overweight and undernourished children and adolescents. AFHK is an outcome of the 2002 Healthy Schools Summit, chaired by Mrs. Laura Bush, Honorary Chair, and former Surgeon General David Satcher, MD, PhD, Founding Chair of AFHK.

AFHK is composed of 51 state teams and a national coordinating and resource group. Guidance is provided by more than 40 national education, fitness, health and nutrition organizations, and government agencies. AFHK operates under the umbrella of “Healthy Schools, Inc.,” a non-profit, non-member organization established to further the goals of the Healthy Schools Summit.

**Getting Involved:** You can help bring about change in your state by adding your expertise to this vital effort. Visit the AFHK website to learn more about how to get involved, and to submit a State Team application. You can also sign up for initiative updates, access relevant articles and resources, and browse the AFHK database of “What’s Working?” model programs.

For more information, visit <http://www.ActionForHealthyKids.org>.

## **Massachusetts Action for Healthy Kids (Mass AFHK) Mission**

**Mission:** Mass AFHK is dedicated to improving children’s nutrition and physical activity in schools by collaborating with diverse stakeholders in advocating, promoting and implementing state initiatives to enhance the school health environment, so children can learn and participate in positive lifestyle behaviors.

### **Contents**

• Introduction	Page 3
• Guiding Principles	Page 4
• Explanation of Terms	Page 5
• A La Carte or Competitive Foods	Page 6
• Elementary School Guidelines (K-5)	Page 6
• Competitive Beverages	Page 7
• Grains	Page 8
• Fruits, Vegetables and Juice	Page 9
• Dairy	Page 10
• Meat, Beans and Nuts	Page 11
• Frozen Desserts	Page 12
• Reference List for a La Carte Food & Beverage Standards to Promote a Healthier School Environment	Page 13
• Members	Page 15

## **Introduction to Massachusetts A La Carte Food & Beverage Standards to Promote a Healthier School Environment**

While the federal government has established nutrition standards for school breakfast and lunch, there are no effective standards for competitive foods at this time. Competitive foods are those foods and beverages sold a la carte, in vending machines, in school stores or as part of school fundraisers that compete with the USDA's National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP).

Typically, competitive foods are relatively low in nutrient density and high in fat, added sugar, and calories. Over the past few decades, school foodservice and other school organizations have increased the availability of these competitive foods. Unfortunately, there has also been an increase in childhood overweight and obesity; the prevalence has almost tripled in the past three decades. The 2005 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey revealed that 27% of all students were either at risk for overweight or definitely overweight, compared to 23% in 1999.

When children replace school meals with less nutritious competitive foods they are at risk for inadequate nutrient intake and excess calorie intake. When competitive foods are purchased in addition to the school meal there is the risk of over-consumption that may contribute to overweight and obesity.

Schools play an important role in promoting and supporting children in the development of healthy eating habits. The following guidelines are recommended for a la carte/competitive food sales:

- Schools should provide students with healthy foods consistent with recommendations from the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- Schools should reinforce healthy messages by teaching healthy eating habits throughout the campus.
- A healthy diet can include all foods, as long as snacks, desserts, side dishes, and entrees are appropriately portioned. Competitive foods should not take the place of a nutritionally balanced meal.
- Schools should promote consistent health and nutrition messages.
- If schools participate in fundraising involving food, the fundraiser should support a healthy school environment and be free from solicitation of foods that are not consistent with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- The school environment should be a place where students can learn to make healthy choices. Marketing aimed at children that promotes consumption of foods of low nutritional quality (high calories/high saturated and/or trans fat) should be eliminated throughout the school environment.
- Schools have the additional incentive to promote a healthy school environment because a healthy, well-nourished student will be ready to learn.

All schools are encouraged to serve reimbursable meals. The following recommendations apply to any a la carte items offered for sale anywhere on the school campus.

## **Guiding Principles**

### **Fortification and Supplementation of Foods and Beverages:**

USDA regulations (21CFR104.20 of the Code of Federal Regulations) states, “The addition of nutrients to specific foods can be an effective way of maintaining and improving the overall nutritional quality of the food supply. However, random fortification of foods could result in over- or under fortification in consumer diets and create nutrient imbalances in the food supply. It could also result in deceptive or misleading claims for certain foods. The Food and Drug Administration does not encourage indiscriminate addition of nutrients to foods.”

In line with this policy and the position of the American Dietetic Association, the best nutritional strategy for promoting optimal health and reducing the risk of chronic disease is to choose a wide variety of naturally nutrient-rich foods.

Nutrition supplements such as amino acids and those derived from natural plant sources such as flowers, leaves, roots, and seeds are not recommended. (Examples of herbal and botanical supplements include Echinacea, ginkgo, ginseng, kava, saw palmetto, St. John’s Wort). These supplements are not certified by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for safety, effectiveness, and what the FDA calls Good Manufacturing Practices. Scientific research is lacking and questions remain as to the benefits, side effects, dosages, value over time and other safety issues.

## **Explanation of Terms**

*A La Carte Food Sales* – The sale involving any food or beverage that students purchase in addition to or in place of the USDA reimbursable school breakfast or lunch. This would be from sources such as vending machines, a la carte lines or kiosks, school stores or snack bars located anywhere on the school campus, including the cafeteria and at athletic events. Sometimes referred to as competitive foods.

*Foods of High Nutritional Value* – Foods of high nutritional value will naturally have a significant amount of at least one key nutrient such as calcium, vitamin C, vitamin A, iron or fiber. Water is a nutrient on its own that should be included as an essential part of a healthy diet.

*Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV)* – USDA regulations (Appendix B of 7 CFR Part 210) prohibit the sales of food and beverages defined as foods of minimal nutritional value. These are defined as: (1) In the case of artificially-sweetened foods, a food which provides less than 5% of the Reference Daily Intakes (RDI) for each of eight specified nutrients per serving; and (2) In the case of all other foods, a food which provides less than 5% of the RDI of each of eight specified nutrients per serving. The eight nutrients to be assessed for this purpose are protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, niacin, riboflavin, thiamine, calcium, and iron. The categories of FMNV include: soda water, water ices, chewing gum, certain candies, hard candy, jellies and gums, marshmallow candies, fondant, licorice, spun candy, and candy-coated popcorn.

*Portion Sizes* – The amount of food served to a student at one time. Portions should be age-appropriate and should not exceed recommendations in each food category.

*Trans Fats* – While trans fat is found naturally at low levels in meat and dairy products, those artificially created in food processing, i.e. “hydrogenation,” where liquid oil is turned into solid fats, have been linked to increasing dietary cholesterol (by raising the LDL, or “bad” cholesterol and decreasing the beneficial HDL, or “good” cholesterol). Food manufacturers are allowed to list amounts of trans fat with less than 0.5 gram as “0” on the Nutrition Facts panel, while the ingredient list may have “shortening” or “partially-hydrogenated vegetable oil” on it.

*Whole Grains* – Whole grains or food made from them contain all the essential parts and naturally-occurring nutrients of the entire grain seed. If the grain has been processed (e.g., cracked, crushed, rolled, extruded, and/or cooked), the food product should deliver approximately the same rich balance of nutrients that are found in the original grain seed. Examples include: amaranth, barley, buckwheat, corn, millet, oats, quinoa, rice (brown, colored, and wild), rye, sorghum, teff, triticale, and wheat. If the first ingredient on the label is whole grain, then the product is predominately whole grain. A good source contains at least 51% by weight of whole grain.

## **A La Carte or Competitive Foods**

### **Recommendation**

- It is recommended that all foods available on the school campus meet USDA standards and the a la carte standards in this guide.
- At least 50% of a la carte items offered should be foods of high nutritional value (for example, fat-free and 1% milk, 100% fruit juice; fresh, frozen, canned and dried fruits and vegetables [with no added sugar]; nuts, seeds, and nut butters, etc.). The remaining 50% still should meet a la carte standards in this document.
- It is recommended that changes are phased in after a formal vacation or school break period.

### **Rationale**

- Increasing the availability of appealing nutritious foods and beverages encourages children to select more healthful options and increase their consumption of foods of high nutritional value.

## **Elementary School A La Carte or Competitive Foods Guidelines (K-5)**

- Sales of competitive foods and beverages at elementary schools should be minimal to keep the focus on the school meals program and to promote healthy weights. Any food or beverage sold at an elementary school, however, should meet the standards for a la carte foods.
- If the school offers a morning or afternoon break/snack, individual items should meet the standards for a la carte foods. The school snack or break should occur at least 1.5 hours before the lunch meal.
- The school environment should encourage a healthy lifestyle from the cafeteria to the classroom to enable children to learn healthy eating practices at a young age.

# **Competitive Beverages**

## **Recommendation**

- Offer fat-free and low-fat white and flavored milk, 100% fruit/vegetable juice, and water or flavored water without added sugar, artificial sweeteners or caffeine.
- Offer beverage portions in sizes no larger than 12 oz. (except water and milk).
- Eliminate the sale of regular and diet soft and sports drinks everywhere on the school campus.

## **Rationale**

- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends choosing foods and beverages that moderate the intake of sugars.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), recommends no more than 4-6 oz. per day of 100% fruit juice for children 1 to 6 years old and no more than 8-12 oz. per day of 100% fruit juice for children 7 to 18 years old.
- Soft and sports drinks are high in calories, low in nutrient density and may contain unnecessary additives. Diet drinks, while not a source of calories, should be excluded as they may displace consumption of healthier beverages.

## **Points for Consideration**

- Potential health problems associated with high intake of sweetened drinks are:
  - 1) overweight or obesity attributable to additional calories in the diet;
  - 2) displacement of milk consumption, resulting in calcium deficiency with an attendant risk of osteoporosis and fractures; and
  - 3) dental caries and potential enamel erosion (American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement on Soft Drinks in Schools, January 2004).

# **Grains**

## **Recommendation**

### ***Total Fat***

No more than 30% of total calories from fat or 7 grams maximum per portion.

### ***Saturated Fat and Trans Fat***

No more than 10% of total calories from saturated fat or 2 grams maximum per portion.  
The Nutrition Facts panel on the product label must state 0 grams trans fat per serving.

### ***Total Carbohydrate***

No more than 30 grams of total carbohydrate per portion (includes natural and added sugar).

### ***Maximum Portion Size***

Chips, crackers, popcorn: 1.25 oz.

Cookies, cereal bars: 2 oz.

Bakery items (e.g. pastries, muffins): 3 oz.

## **Rationale**

- Trans fats are found in food products in the form of hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils. They tend to raise total blood cholesterol and LDL cholesterol similar to saturated fats.
- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans encourage consumption of a variety of grains daily, with an emphasis on whole grains.

## **Points for Consideration**

- Whole grains have at least 1 gram of fiber per serving.
- A moderate fiber food has 2-4 grams of fiber per serving (AAP).
- A high fiber food have >5 grams of fiber per serving (AAP).

## **Fruits and Vegetables**

### **Recommendation**

- Make quality\* fruits and vegetables available at any place a la carte foods are sold. For example, dried fruit in vending, fresh fruit like pineapple slices or melon cubes, and fresh vegetables like baby carrots in a la carte lines and school stores.

\*Quality = fruits and vegetables that are fresh, frozen, dried, or canned without added fat, sugar, or excessive sodium.

### ***Total Fat***

No more than 30% of total calories from fat or 7 grams maximum per portion.

### ***Saturated Fat and Trans Fat***

No more than 10% of total calories from saturated fat or 2 grams maximum per portion. The Nutrition Facts panel on the product label must state 0 grams trans fat per serving.

### ***Total Carbohydrate***

No more than 30 grams of total carbohydrate per portion (includes natural and added sugar).

### ***Portion Size***

Strive to meet USDA portions (1/2 cup minimum fresh, canned and frozen; 1/4 cup dried).

### **Rationale**

- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans encourage consumption of a variety of fruits and vegetables daily – 2 cups fruit and 2 ½ cups vegetable per day are recommended for a 2,000 calorie diet.
- As suggested by the Dietary Guidelines and the National Cancer Institute’s 5 A Day Program, fruits and vegetables provide essential vitamins and minerals, fiber and other substances that may protect against many chronic diseases.

## **Juice**

### **Recommendation**

- Offer only 100% fruit and/or vegetable juice (see competitive beverage guidelines).

### ***Maximum Portion Size***

12 oz.

### **Rationale**

- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), recommends no more than 4-6 oz. per day of 100% fruit juice for children 1 to 6 years old and no more than 8-12 oz. per day of 100% fruit juice for children 7 to 18 years old.

# **Dairy**

## **Recommendation**

- Serve fat-free and low-fat dairy products (fat-free and 1% milk, low-fat yogurt, and reduced-fat cheeses).
- An 8-12 oz. serving of milk is the ultimate goal for serving sizes, ideally in a variety of low-fat flavors in plastic, re-sealable containers.
- Pudding: Low-fat or fat-free milk should be the first ingredient listed. Puddings made with rice or soy beverages must contain 1 gram per oz. protein and be fortified with vitamin D and calcium at comparable levels to dairy milks.

### ***Total Fat***

No more than 30% of total calories from fat or 7 grams maximum per portion with the exception of reduced-fat cheeses served within the portion guidelines below.

### ***Saturated Fat and Trans Fat***

No more than 10% of total calories from saturated fat or 2 grams maximum per portion with the exception of reduced-fat cheeses served within the portion guidelines below.

The Nutrition Facts panel on the product label must state 0 grams trans fat per serving.

### ***Total Carbohydrate***

No more than 32 grams total carbohydrate per 8 oz. portion for fat-free and 1% flavored milks (4g/oz of total carbohydrate includes added sugar and natural milk sugar, lactose).

### ***Maximum Portion Size***

Yogurt: 8 oz.

Cheese: 2 oz.

Drinkable yogurt: 10 oz.

Milk: 16 oz.

Pudding: 4 oz.

## **Rationale**

- Low calcium intake is one of the most significant nutrient deficiencies identified in Healthy People 2010. Milk and milk products are high in nutritional value and provide calcium, protein, vitamin D and other nutrients essential for bone growth and overall health.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Clinical Report, *Optimizing Bone Health and Calcium Intakes of Infants, Children, and Adolescents*, recognizes children's low calcium intakes and urges pediatricians to recommend the daily consumption of milk, cheese and yogurt, and other calcium-rich foods.

## **Meat, Beans and Nuts**

### **Recommendation**

#### ***Total Fat***

No more than 30% of total calories from fat or 7 grams maximum per portion, with the exception of nuts, seeds and non-hydrogenated nut butters served within the portion guidelines below.

#### ***Saturated Fat and Trans Fat***

No more than 10% of total calories from saturated fat or 2 grams maximum per portion. The Nutrition Facts panel on the product label must state 0 grams trans fat per serving.

#### ***Maximum Portion Size***

Entrée items or other protein sources: no larger than the maximum requirements for age/grade groups under the USDA meal pattern.

Trail mix, nuts, seeds and jerky: 1.25 oz.

Non-hydrogenated nut butters: 4 Tbsp.

### **Rationale**

- Non-hydrogenated nut butters like all-natural peanut butter or almond butter have no trans fats and minimal saturated fat and provide healthy unsaturated fats.

### **Point for Consideration**

- Meats, beans, and nuts offer protein and other valuable nutrients such as zinc, iron and B vitamins.

## **Frozen Desserts**

### **Recommendation**

#### ***Total Fat***

No more than 30% of total calories from fat or 7 grams maximum per portion.

#### ***Saturated Fat and Trans Fat***

No more than 10% of total calories from saturated fat or 2 grams maximum per portion. The Nutrition Facts panel on the product label must state 0 grams trans fat per serving.

#### ***Total Carbohydrate***

No more than 30 grams total carbohydrate per portion (includes natural and added sugar).

#### ***Maximum Portion Size***

4 oz.

### **Rationale**

- The portion size restriction will allow those schools that are striving for 100% compliance with the a la carte standards in this guide to purchase desirable, healthier frozen dessert options for students.
- Low fat ice cream products are considered frozen desserts and, therefore, should be evaluated using these standards.

## **Reference List for a La Carte Food & Beverage Standards to Promote a Healthier School Environment**

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## **Members**

Mass AFHK is composed of leaders in children's nutrition, education, health and physical activity.

### **Current members are from the following statewide organizations:**

American Heart Association, New England Affiliate  
American Academy of Pediatrics, Massachusetts  
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts  
Boston Medical Center's Nutrition & Fitness for Life Program  
Fitness Forward  
Harvard Prevention Research Center, Harvard School of Public Health  
John C. Stalker Institute of Food and Nutrition at Framingham State College  
MAC Farms, Inc.  
Massachusetts Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (MAHPERD)  
Massachusetts Department of Education  
Massachusetts Department of Public Health  
Massachusetts Dietetic Association  
Massachusetts Governors' Council on Physical Fitness and Sport  
Massachusetts Public Health Association  
New England Dairy & Food Council  
Project Bread  
School Nutrition Association of Massachusetts  
Tufts University, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy  
University of Massachusetts  
UMass Extension Nutrition Education Program  
USDA Food and Nutrition Service – Child Nutrition Programs, Northeast Region.

Mass AFHK is co-chaired by Janet Schwartz of Framingham State College and Vanessa Cavallaro of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. Inquiries about Mass AFHK should be directed to the Mass AFHK State Team Liaison, Sarah Hess at [shess@newenglanddairy.com](mailto:shess@newenglanddairy.com).

For more information, visit [www.ActionForHealthyKids.org](http://www.ActionForHealthyKids.org).

To become a member, contact Linda Fischer at [lfischer@doe.mass.edu](mailto:lfischer@doe.mass.edu).