

PETITION TO THE PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL REFORM COMMISSION

Petition of the Philadelphia Coalition for Healthy Children, on behalf of its members as well as the children of Philadelphia's public schools, for the creation of the "Philadelphia School Food Reform Plan," a new standard for school foods.

1. The Philadelphia Coalition for Healthy Children is an alliance of Philadelphia school parents, advocates, doctors, nutritionists and community groups that have come together to work with the Philadelphia School District in order to improve the nutritional quality of food available to children in schools. The Coalition has strong support from Philadelphia City Council and the state legislature.
2. Obesity is fast reaching epidemic proportions among our children caused, in part, by diets high in fat and sugar. One in seven young people is obese and one in three is overweight. We need to make drastic improvements in our children's diets, which includes changing their eating habits during the time they are at school.
3. Diabetes is threatening our children's future, with Type II, or what used to be known as adult-onset diabetes, occurring among children as young as 5. Type II diabetes could be avoided by encouraging children to eat a balanced and nutritious diet.
4. Many children eat two-thirds of their meals at school; some come to school hungry or malnourished, and schools may be the only place where these children can eat healthy, well-balanced meals. That is why it is so critical to children's health that the food available in schools set the highest standard for life long eating habits.
5. A la carte items sold in schools are not required to meet nutritional standards and many children forgo the school lunch for brand name treats. School principals find it extremely difficult to get their students to eat the federal school lunch, when more enticing choices, such as snack foods with Looney Tunes cartoons and a free CD-Rom, are available.
6. In order to learn, children need to be alert and well-nourished. To accomplish the goal of educating our children, we need to feed them a balanced diet.
7. We are offering the wrong foods to our children, causing dramatic increases in pediatric obesity and diabetes. Chips and drink sizes are twice as large as they were when we were growing up, and last year 75% of the beverages purchased from school vending machines in Philadelphia were high sugar/empty calorie drinks.

8. Schools should be safe havens for children, where only healthy foods are offered to them. Foods high in sugar, salt and fat are everywhere, and are readily available to children on their way to and from school, and in the communities where they live.
9. Parents are overwhelmingly in favor of limiting the choice offered to their children by the School District of Philadelphia. A telephone poll (conducted by Madonna Young Opinion Research) found that 9 out of 10 parents want choices restricted in school vending machines to fruit juice and water.
10. There is extensive support for improvements to school food. One USDA project that is widely popular among federal legislators, provides daily fruit and vegetable snacks to school children in four Midwestern states. New York City is reducing fat content and banning candy, soda and other sugary snacks, while San Francisco has adopted a “no empty calories” policy for school food.
11. Mr. Vallas, through his excellent leadership, should help Philadelphia become the national leader in the fight against childhood obesity by setting the highest standard for school food. “Building a better school district” sets the tone for improvement in each and every part of the School District of Philadelphia.
12. The School Reform Commission is guided by the principle of putting our children’s education first by providing a better environment in which to learn. Our children deserve a school environment that reinforces the lessons they learn in class, and feeds them only healthy food.
13. The School Reform Commission has heard extensive testimony from doctors and nutritionists, who work with children’s health issues daily, advising the Commission to reform school food.
14. The Commission should appoint a blue ribbon panel of nutritionists and educators to analyze the wealth of data that has already been submitted through the hearing process and draft a new “Philadelphia School Food Reform Plan” for the district. The panel must include members of the community who have been invested in this issue, including parents, teachers, nutritionists, doctors, and members of local nonprofits who are focused on nutrition and healthy eating.

Request for the Philadelphia School Food Reform Plan

So WHEREAS, the School Reform Commission was charged by the Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Mayor of the City of Philadelphia with ensuring a long term solution to the educational challenges faced by Philadelphia public schools;

And WHEREAS, the future of our children’s health is determined to

a significant degree by the quality of the food they eat during school;

NOW THEREFORE, the Philadelphia Coalition for Healthy Children respectfully requests that the School Reform Commission create the Philadelphia School Food Reform Plan, a new standard for school food, agreed upon by a blue-ribbon panel of experts, that follows two guiding principles:

- (a) All beverage offerings made available to children in district schools will be limited to water, 100 percent juice, and milk.
- (b) All foods served or sold in the school district will have no more than 30 percent calories from total fat and less than 10 percent calories from saturated fat; the amount of trans fatty acids will be sharply limited.