

## SAMPLE OP-ED

If you think selling soda and other unhealthy beverages in school is a bad idea you are not alone. The Food Trust, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit, conducted a survey last year which found that nine out of ten public school parents wanted to ban soda sales in schools. The parents polled wanted their children's schools to sell only water, real fruit juice and milk. Given that our country is faced with an epidemic of childhood obesity, the survey confirmed the conventional wisdom that "Mom knows best."

We know that our children are eating too much of the bad stuff and not enough of the good. Currently only 2% of children meet the guidelines for a healthy diet set by the USDA. Soda consumption among children has doubled in the last decade and is the leading source of added sugar in their diets. In fact, the average teenager gets 15 to 20 teaspoons of sugar a day from soft drinks alone.

New studies are showing that soda and other junk drinks are significant contributors to serious health problems for children. A study conducted in London found that a modest decrease in consumption of soda led to a significant decrease in the percentage of elementary school children who were overweight or obese. Another recent study found that soda is a significant factor in high blood pressure among children. A concern about these health consequences has led the American Academy of Pediatrics to call for school districts across the country to eliminate soft drink sales.

Philadelphia now has one of the strongest beverage policies in the nation. Starting this summer, school vending machines will only be stocked with pure water, 100% fruit juice and 100% milk. This would not have been possible without concerned citizens uniting together to form the Philadelphia Coalition for Healthy Children. Members of the coalition contacted the school district, the media, and their elected officials to demand action on this issue. The Coalition's work led to hearings before the Philadelphia School Reform Commission and eventually the passage of the new policy.

Parents, doctors, and educators need to join together and communicate their feelings on this issue to the East Stroudsburg and Pleasant Valley school boards. Parents deserve the choice of having their child attend a public school that provides only healthy, nutritious foods, and children should not be forced to subsidize their own education by purchasing products that are harmful to their health. A new healthy beverage policy will become a source of community pride and students will enjoy drinking wholesome nutrient-rich beverages like juice and milk or pure, refreshing water. They will learn that good nutrition is an important part of feeling energized and healthy, and will develop healthy habits that last a lifetime. It is time that schools get out of the business of pedaling junk food and instead focus on creating a healthy learning environment for our children.

If we did it, so can you!