

Water, Water, Everywhere: Healthy Drinks for Kids

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»» ISSUE

Among the seemingly endless strategies for healthy weight maintenance, only a few have proven effective. Recent research indicates that reducing the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is a key strategy in obesity prevention. As a calorie-free beverage, tap water is a healthy and free alternative to sugary sodas, juices, and sports drinks. Creating healthy environments that promote healthy choices is a way to encourage kids to adopt healthy habits. By ensuring that all students have the option to drink free, tap water in schools, California can take a big step towards forming appropriate beverage consumption patterns at schools.

»» NEED

There are a number of barriers to providing drinking free water. Communities have already run into two specific, no-cost barriers. First, there is confusion over whether drinking water may be made available in school eating areas (officially known as "food service areas"). Second, with major beverage companies now selling their own lines of bottled water under contracts with school districts, the provision of free water has, in some cases, been undermining purchases of bottled water offered through those contracts. Kids need water - whether they can afford a bottle or not. Prohibiting schools from entering into contracts that (explicitly or implicitly) discourage or disallow access to free tap water will prevent this problem from adversely influencing health habits.

»» REQUEST

Schools shall allow for the provision of water in areas where kids eat meals.

AB 2704 would:

1. **Prohibit beverage contracts from restricting the provision of free tap water.** Schools and school districts would not be able to enter into beverage contracts that impede the offer of free tap water to students.
2. **Allow for the provision of free, tap water in places where kids eat.** Kids should be able to drink water in the areas in which they eat their meals. The manner in which water is available should be up to the individual school.

»» HISTORY

Legislation to rid schools of soda and many snack foods was enacted in 2005. This effort focused on beverages *sold* on school campuses. The specific barriers described in the bill have not been previously addressed in legislation. This session, Assembly Member Krekorian introduced legislation, AB 2965, related to the toxicity of water in schools.

»» OUTCOMES

Water is a healthy, natural, thirst-quenching beverage. By creating a nutrition environment where water is readily available, students will be able to drink free water instead of purchasing sugar-sweetened beverages. This can be an important step forward in combating childhood obesity, while also encouraging healthy behaviors for a lifetime.