

Banning Sodas in Your School :

A Short Organizing Guide

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest school district in the country, unanimously passed a motion banning soda sales in every school throughout the district. Because of the size of LAUSD, the process of getting this motion passed may serve as a model for other districts across the country. The following list summarizes important research and organizing strategies that might prove useful as other districts tackle this issue.

Research:

- Find out the process for passing motions in your school district.
- Identify your district's school board members and how to contact them.
- Research the voting history of each board member on school food and nutrition issues. If you don't have a systematic way to collect this information then set up meetings with each board member and find out their views on relevant issues.
- Often motions go before a committee first. If this is the case in your district, then develop a strategy to provide input at the committee meeting.
- Are public speakers allowed on the day of the vote? Are the number of speaking slots limited? If so, fill up the slots with allies early on.
- Are there current district school food policies regarding soda and junk food already on the books? If this is the case then you may not need a new motion but instead a strategy to enforce current rules.
- Identify other key players beside School Board Members who influence school food policy, such as School Food Service Directors, Business Service Managers, and Superintendents.
- Identify schools in and outside the district (or state) that have already eliminated or are attempting to eliminate the sale of unhealthy beverages and junk food.
- Gather accurate data and health studies on the effects of junk food and sodas.

Community Outreach & Coalition Building:

- You can't do this alone – expand your base of support.
- Target outreach to likely supporters and be creative (i.e., health teachers, parents, community garden advocates, student athletes). However, at the same time remember to be careful about who you contact because banning soda and junk food is a controversial issue. You don't want to give early warning to likely opponents of your work.
- Outreach will vary depending on your audience. Banning soda touches on a variety of issues including health and nutrition, commercialization of public schools, social justice, and food access.
- Get 'buy-in' from your targets - organize presentations and workshops about the health effects of junk food and high sugar, calorie-filled beverages. The "sugar presentation" in LAUSD was highly successful --- measure out the amount of sugar the average teenage boy drinks in soda every week and present it to a group of students and talk about what sugar does to the body.
- Collaborate with other food and health agencies working on school food issues.

Key Organizing Strategies:

- Develop a media strategy early on.
 - BE QUIET! Don't alert the media too soon - be public on the day of the vote, not leading up to it. In LA we didn't send out a press release until one day before the vote because we didn't want the media to alert opponents about what we were doing. This proved incredibly important both in LAUSD and in the Oakland soda ban.
 - Two days before the vote, two of the original authors of the motion had an Op-Ed piece published in the LA Times. Get your message out to the media in ways that you can control. Op-Ed's and letters to the editor are critical.
 - Find a good journalist who you trust and propose the story idea to them.
- Be prepared to "educate" the school board on the issue.
- Identify where your votes are coming from. Set up meetings with those board members and/or their key staff people who need to be swayed. In L.A. we met with each school board member and/or staff people at least twice.
- Identify the opposition and their main arguments and come up with counter arguments.
- Frame the issue in the affirmative. In L.A. we called it "The Motion to Promote Healthy Beverages" and not "The Soda Ban." Language is critical.
- Develop a lobbying strategy which includes phone calls, emails, and letters to board members.
- Hold creative actions which reinforce your position. For example, in LA we dropped off the jars of sugar to every board member.
- Fill the room with supporters the day of the big vote. Signs, colorful t-shirts, and balloons get the attention of board members and the media.

For a complete report on the LAUSD Healthy Beverage Campaign visit: www.uepi.oxy.edu

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The Center for Food & Justice is based at Occidental College and part of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI). The Center works to improve access to fresh, healthy foods in all communities and is a leader in developing innovative strategies to help establish a more just, democratic and sustainable food system.

As part of the Center, the Healthy School Food Coalition (HSFC) is an organized body made up of parents, teachers, students and community and food advocates working to develop a comprehensive food and nutrition policy in the Los Angeles Unified School District.