

BEST PRACTICES FOR POSTING NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Based on current research, this guide was developed to provide strategies for schools posting nutritional information as required in the Massachusetts Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods and Beverages in Public Schools.

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Options for making nutrition information available for competitive foods include:

- 1) Displaying on the school food service website
- 2) Displaying at point of selection (POS)
 - On signs near items on the serving line
 - At the point of entry to the serving line
 - On stickers for wrapped items
 - On or near vending machines
- 3) Displaying in other areas of the cafeteria:
 - On posters, on flyers, or in a reference binder

Best practices:

- **Begin online and then expand to other venues.** Posting nutrition information at has been easy for some school food directors and challenging for others¹. Work in steps to develop the approach that is right for your district.
- **Advocate for comprehensive nutrition education in your schools.** In the absence of nutrition education, posting nutrition facts may not affect students' purchasing habits¹. However, ability to use food labels does improve after nutrition education².
- **Use posters and banners.** These are top marketing strategies in school food service³. Consider displaying nutrition labels on a wall or other attractive display area¹.
- **POS displays may not always be the most effective option.** While some studies show that POS nutrition information helps high school students make healthier choices and increases satisfaction with school meals^{4,5} one showed no impact¹.
- **Display information that is easy to read and interpret.** One study⁴ used the Nutrition Facts Label format because students were already familiar with it. Be sure to use large, clear, bold fonts.
- **Talk with school nurses and health teachers to get their thoughts on how POS nutrition information would impact the students.** Though research is lacking, some dietitians and doctors have suggested that too much information at POS may adversely affect body image and increase stress in children⁶. Make nutrition information easy to access but be sensitive to potential issues of disordered eating. Utilizing flyers or an accessible binder can be a good compromise⁷.
- **Educate coaches.** In one study, student athletes were especially interested in posted nutrition facts¹.



- **Actively promote the initiative.** Directors who implemented POS displays suggested getting on the morning announcements ¹. Other suggestions include using parent newsletters and staff email blasts.

Whichever method you choose, collecting feedback from students, parents, teachers, school lunch staff, and other school food service directors will help you make this initiative a success.



References:

- ¹ Rainville AJ, Choi K, Ragg M, King A, Carr DH. Nutrition information at the point of selection in high schools does not affect purchases. *J Child Nutr Manag.* 2010:34. <http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=14752>. Accessed 2/22/13.
- ² Hawthorne KM, Moreland K, Griffin IJ, Abrams SA. An educational program enhances food label understanding of young adolescents. *J Am Diet Assoc.* 2006;106:913-916.
- ³ Castillo A, Nettes MF. Exploring trends and barriers to implementation of branding and marketing concepts in the school nutrition setting. *J Child Nutr Manag.* 2012:36 <http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=18049>. Accessed 2/22/13.
- ⁴ Conklin MT, Cranage DA, Lambert CU. Nutrition information at point of selection affects food chosen by high school students. *J Child Nutr Manag.* 2005;29. <http://docs.schoolnutrition.org/newsroom/jcnm/05spring/Conklin/index.asp>. Accessed 2/22/13.
- ⁵ Cranage DA, Conklin MT, Lambert CU. High school students are more satisfied customers when nutrition information is posted. *J Child Nutr Manag.* 2006;30. <http://docs.schoolnutrition.org/newsroom/jcnm/06spring/cranage/>. Accessed 2/22/13.
- ⁶ Ellin A. What's eating our kids? Fears about 'bad' foods. New York Times. February 15, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/26/health/nutrition/26food.html>. Accessed 2/22/13.
- ⁷ Jin L. HUDS says calorie information will return to dining halls. December 9, 2008. The Harvard Crimson. <http://www.thecrimson.harvard.edu/article/2009/3/11/huds-says-calorie-information-will-return/> Accessed 2/26/13.

