

## IV. THE DEBATE ON MARKETING UNHEALTHY FOODS IN SCHOOLS

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As an advocate for a healthy school environment, you may run into people who argue for the continuation of the status quo—allowing unhealthy food and beverage messages in schools. Below are some examples of arguments for and against marketing unhealthy foods and beverages in schools. These arguments are brief and to the point and can be used as succinct speaking points.

### Start with the Organization’s Mission

The mission of a corporation is to make money. The mission of a school is to educate students. The mission of commercial junk food advertising is to sell their products. Therefore, commercial messages in schools distract students from their primary focus of learning and have no business in schools.



#### Argument For:

Children are surrounded by advertisements outside of school. Why does it matter if they are exposed to advertising in school?



#### Argument Against:

Everywhere children go, they are bombarded with marketing messages designed to make them lifelong consumers. Schools should be a safe haven from marketing influences—especially from junk food and beverage advertising. Studies show that youth are more apt to desire and actually consume an advertised food or beverage.

### Commercial Activities Often Promote Unhealthy Products

Effective advertising will cause students to desire things that are not necessarily good for them or may even be harmful to their well-being. Recent reports documenting the increase in child obesity has drawn attention to the types of foods and beverages marketed in schools, specifically “junk food” like soda and fast food.



#### Argument For:

What’s wrong with marketing soda or snacks to students? They need to learn to make choices on their own.



#### Argument Against:

Students receive mixed messages when they are taught about healthy eating in the classroom and find vending machines, snack bars and student stores on their campus that market and sell junk food and sweetened beverages.

*“The purpose of public education is not to provide basic training for a consumer society, but to cultivate citizens capable of thinking critically about the consumer society they inhabit. Infusing the classroom with consumerism is at odds with this civic purpose.”*

**Michael J. Sandel**  
**Professor of Government**  
**Harvard University**

## Consider the Ethical Issues of Marketing in Schools

Education laws requiring children to attend school make them, in effect, a “captive audience” with little or no ability to shield themselves from school-based marketing. Many students, particularly those in elementary grades, have not yet developed the literacy skills necessary to understand the intent of commercial messages.



### Argument For:

Children and young people of today are too sophisticated to believe what advertisements try to sell them.



### Argument Against:

If advertising doesn't work, why do companies spend billions of dollars trying to entice children and youth to buy their products? Studies show that youth are more apt to desire and actually consume an advertised food product. And most of the food and beverage marketing that is geared toward kids can be characterized as junk food and sweetened beverages. Younger children, especially those under 8-years-old, do not understand advertising's persuasive intent.

## Commercial Activities Supplant Traditional Revenue Sources

Revenues generated from commercial activities supplant rather than supplement traditional revenue streams such as local taxes and state and federal aid. This can absolve local districts and states of their funding obligations.



### Argument For:

Addressing commercialism is not a priority. Our school has more pressing problems—like our current financial situation.



### Argument Against:

The school-funding crisis is how commercialism has crept into schools. While businesses may appear to be working with schools to help solve their budget crisis, what these businesses are really doing is creating an opportunity to make direct sales and cultivate brand loyalty. If businesses are that bent on “helping,” then let them make a cash donation that has no strings attached requiring logos, product placement, or marketing materials promoting their products on school campuses.

### Information adapted from:

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Sandel, Michael J. Are We Still a Commonwealth? Markets, Morals, and Civic Life. Available at: [www.mfh.org/newsandevents/newsletter/MassHumanities/Fall2004/sandel.html](http://www.mfh.org/newsandevents/newsletter/MassHumanities/Fall2004/sandel.html).

Salisbury, C.G. 2004. *Make an investment in our school children: Increase the nutritional value of school lunch programs.* Brigham Young University Education and Law Journal 2004 (2): 331-352.

US Department of Agriculture. 2001. *Foods sold in competition with USDA meal programs: A Report to Congress.* Available at: [www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/competitivefoods/report\\_congress.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/competitivefoods/report_congress.htm).

## CAPTIVE KIDS: SELLING OBESITY AT SCHOOLS

An ACTION GUIDE to Stop the Marketing of Unhealthy Foods and Beverages at School