

Promoting Water Consumption in Schools

State and federal lawmakers recently passed legislation to ensure that students have access to free drinking water with school meals. Schools are expected to be in compliance with this important obesity prevention strategy by the start of the 2011-2 academic year. Read below for more on the importance of water and some examples of how to make it happen in your school.

Why water?

As a **matter of basic equity**, all children should be able to access free drinking water in school. And, as a healthy alternative to sugary drinks, water is also perfect for obesity prevention.

Water is **essential for life** and has **no calories**. Poor hydration can result in impaired cognition, altered mood, and reduced ability to engage in physical activity.

The **Institute of Medicine** recommends that we consume water with meals in order to meet our daily needs. A recent report from the **Surgeon General** on combating obesity highlights the need to promote water consumption in schools.

Research supports the role of increased water consumption for obesity prevention.

A growing body of evidence concludes that **sugary drinks, like sodas and sports drinks, are a large driver of the obesity epidemic**, contributing countless empty calories to our diets. Policymakers are rightly focusing on removing these unhealthy beverages from schools and replacing them with water.

Habitual water drinkers generally have a better quality diet than non-habitual water drinkers, including a lower intake of sugary drinks.

Drinking sugar-sweetened beverages can increase overall calorie intake and risk of obesity while **increased water consumption can lower calorie intake and result in weight loss** in overweight adolescents.

Research has found that the combination of nutrition education with the provision of water can have a beneficial impact on children's water consumption and weight status.

What's happening now in California's schools?

A 2009 survey found that **at least 40% of schools** in responding districts reported **no access to free drinking water** for students during meals. Anecdotal evidence from students, parents, and community advocates demonstrates that many schools have **inoperable, poorly maintained, or unhygienic water fountains**. Moreover, the current water fountain requirements for schools are **known to be inadequate**.

New requirements passed late in 2010 require that water be available to students in school food service areas by the start of the 2011-2 academic year. Read the other side of this fact sheet for examples of how to make it happen your school.

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The photos on the left show two “Hydration Stations” at two California schools. For about \$1000, a school in Oakland installed the system pictured in the bottom two photographs by relying upon private and public funds and volunteer parent labor.

Hydration stations allow students to easily fill cups and reusable water bottles and can be situated in many places throughout the campus, including the cafeteria, outside eating areas, and the gym. These units also allow the water to be chilled and filtered: a great advantage given that students often express distaste for tepid water and some schools may have contaminants in their pipes or have impure water sources.



In late 2007, schools in New York City installed “water jets” with support from the city departments of health and education. The water jets dispense chilled clean water. Depending on the size, the water jets range in price from ~\$700 to ~\$900. Although this was a pilot program at first, the city has since secured American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA, or “stimulus”) funding to expand the program. Initial results from the pilot indicate that water consumption has increased and cafeteria and school staff report no unanticipated problems.



Schools in LA County piloted a program to bring cool, filtered tap water to students using the 5-gallon dispensers and donated water bottles pictured to the left. Annual costs of this pilot program were ~\$2000 including the equipment, lead tests, and filter installation and replacement. For a school with ~1600 students, the average cost per student per year was less than \$1.20. Initial results of the pilot indicate that student water consumption increased.



Examples above demonstrate schools that have found external private or public funding. However, other schools, within existing budgets, are providing free tap water to students in a number of low-tech ways including easily available and inexpensive water dispensers and cups (<\$50) such as the ones pictured to the left.

For more information, please visit www.waterinschools.org!