



## Candy 'n' cupcakes: nutrition and fundraising collide in school

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Schools are nearly soda-free. Riding a wave of wellness, they're serving juice made from actual fruit and lunches with local vegetables. On the menu today at John Jay High School in Cross River: turkey hot dogs on whole wheat buns with Roasted Veggie Fries.

Now comes a new challenge for the school wellness committees.

What about the brownies at the annual bake sale? What about the cheerleaders' cupcake fundraiser? What's to become of the candy drive?

"Can you really expect to sell Wheat Thins or whole-wheat toast as a fundraiser?" asked Bishop Nowotnik, a Port Chester parent, alumnus and wellness committee member.

Every school in the country that participates in the federal lunch program was required to launch a "wellness policy" in September. The policies are home-grown and free ranging, touching on everything from physical education to the health curriculum to the food-service contracts. Many call for eliminating food-related fundraisers that conflict with nutrition standards.

This is posing a challenge to individual PTAs and booster clubs. Certain sales have become tradition, and there's only so much gift wrap a family can take.

"While there are many other fundraising ideas, many of them are not as inexpensive as candy bars," said Aimee Hamlin of the New York Coalition for Healthy School Lunches.

New York's statewide PTA organization voted last year to avoid trans fats in school meals and sales. There was much opposition due to the fundraising factor, Hamlin said. Her group wrote the PTA resolution, which is more of a recommendation than a requirement.

She and others see an opportunity to get creative. Walk-a-thons, T-shirt sales and holiday boutiques are gaining favor over candy sales, said Claudette Clarke, a Nyack school board member and chief clinical dietitian at Nyack Hospital.

"There's a bigger emphasis on trying to find ways to fund raise. It has spurred us on to really think of other avenues as well," she said.

Upstate near Rochester, the Gananda PTSA held an apple sale in lieu of candy this fall. In New York City, after-school smoothies are a new trend, Hamlin said. Other ideas are being e-mailed around: Trail Mix, raffles, singing telegrams.

### For more info

Westchester County has compiled information about school wellness policies, along with a new children's magazine called Kids X-Press: [www.westchestergov.com/health/FitKids.htm](http://www.westchestergov.com/health/FitKids.htm)

The Westchester Coalition for Better School Food is a grass-roots organization that shares information and "best practices" on wellness and nutrition: [www.betterschoolfood.com](http://www.betterschoolfood.com)

The New York Coalition for Healthy School Lunches advocates nutrition policies and education "to create food and health-literate students": [www.healthylunches.org](http://www.healthylunches.org)

The California-based Center for Eco-Literacy compiles information about sustainable living, including guides on school nutrition and school gardens: [www.ecoliteracy.org](http://www.ecoliteracy.org)

"I would hate to see bake sales go by the wayside," said B.J. Sharpe, a PTA member in White Plains. Along with desserts, the popular Election Day sale at George Washington Elementary School offered numerous healthy-looking choices, including a half-dozen homemade soups. Set up next to a polling place, the sale had made \$850 by early afternoon for the elementary PTA.

"It's such a great moneymaker, because everybody helps," Sharpe said.

Each school seems to be working on compromises. Birthday cupcakes are problematic, said Robert Burke, a nurse practitioner who works at John F. Kennedy Elementary School in Port Chester. He's seen first-hand evidence of the obesity epidemic, but he's also come to realize the implications of a cupcake ban.

"A lot of these kids can't afford to have a big birthday party, and (families) use the school as a way to celebrate their party; to make them feel special in a way," he said. "How do you reconcile that from more of a social perspective? That was something that blew me away."

The current birthday policy at Kennedy is to allow cupcakes as long as they are supplemented by a healthy snack, he said. Soda is sent back home. Birthdays are celebrated in group fashion, once a month.

At the high school level, fundraisers are an issue because student groups rely on them for team trips and scholarships. In Port Chester, the sales are only being restricted during the school day.

"I think in the high school, habits will be a little bit harder to break," Clarke said. "These are teens who have gone through seven, eight years of their lives already being ingrained with the idea of using food - and specifically cakes and cookies and such - as a fundraiser."

Many schools are treating this as a transition year, concentrating on the lunch menus and an expanded health curriculum. Ossining held an apple tasting at Brookside Elementary School last month, bringing in locally grown Jonagolds, Galas and Macouns. Faith Lippe, a nutrition consultant who works with Ossining, suggests non-food fundraisers like raffles, iTunes gift certificates, store gift cards or car washes.

"When you reflect on it, there are far too many candy sales," Pelham Superintendent Charles Wilson said. "Every day shouldn't be Halloween, which I'm afraid sometimes it is."

Wellness policies were required by the federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. The government didn't mandate how to define wellness, said Janet Brown, an organic farmer and a program officer at the nonprofit Center for Ecoliteracy in California. That's a good thing, she said, because schools can adapt their policy to the variations of culture, income levels and local agriculture.

The common denominator, Brown said, is to buy into the idea that food sold at school becomes a lesson on what to eat. She calls this "a complete merger of public education with public health."

That education process will take time, said Joseph Durney, Port Chester's athletic director and head of the district wellness committee.

"I can remember a time when smoking in teachers' lounges was acceptable," he said. "It's just absolutely inappropriate, but it took many years to change that culture of thinking. And I think this will be a similar kind of thing."

### **On the Web**

In light of the switch to healthier fare in school cafeterias, how should schools and school organizations handle bake and candy sales? Visit the "In the schools" forum at [LoHud.com](http://LoHud.com).