

# COKE MACHINES IN SEATTLE SCHOOLS

## THE FACTS:

**Over 20,000 Seattle students are encouraged to buy sugary, caffeinated beverages at school each day. The Seattle School District has a 5-year exclusive vending machine contract with the Coca-Cola corporation – principals and student organizations get cash for promoting sales of Coke products in their schools.**

## Who's Selling?

Coca-Cola and Pepsi are global corporations seeking to brand youth at a young age. In 1998, the Seattle School Board invited these two corporations to bid on an exclusive contract for access to Seattle schoolchildren. Coke won. For the next five years, coke products are the only beverages which can be served or sold in Seattle schools, aside from milk in the school lunch program.

## Who's Buying?

Children ages 11-18 are buying cokes in 20 Seattle middle schools and high schools. Building staff are buying coke products in the Coke vending machines in all 91 schools. Even elementary school students ages 5-11 see teachers and other school staff with coke cans at school each day. All 47,000 children in the Seattle Public Schools are influenced by Coke, directly or indirectly.

## Who Decided?

The Seattle School Board decided to sign a district-wide contract in 1998. District attorney Ron English sought input from 6 of the 91 school principals in moving his recommendation forward.

Each school principal decides on the number and placement of the vending machines and which coke products will be stocked daily. The contract includes financial incentives for increasing sales to students.

Many parents, community members and District nutrition staff spoke out against this contract but were ignored.

## What's the Policy?

In 1997, the District rescinded a new policy of seeking paid advertising as a source of revenue, after public outcry. The Coke contract is a form of paid advertising, according to School Board president Don Nielsen. Thus, it would appear that the Coke contract violates the district's policy.

## What's the Law?

USDA guidelines on foods and beverages in competition with the school nutrition programs have restrictions on school vending machines. Machines selling carbonated beverages are not allowed in lunchrooms but are often found right outside the door.

## What's the Practice?

In reality, Seattle youth are drinking 16-oz. bottles of Coke for breakfast as soon as they arrive at school in the morning. Students buy and drink Coke products throughout the school day—between classes, at lunchtime, and after school.

High schools and middle schools have large Coke machines scattered around the school in high traffic areas -- entrance, student lounge, or the playground.

Students are exposed to Coke logos on cans and bottles, on the vending machines, on the billboard delivery trucks, on promotional materials distributed by school staff.

## What about Water?

Many Seattle children refuse to drink water from school drinking fountains on the grounds that it tastes bad and is lukewarm. Kids report that the drinking fountains are 'nasty'. A recent study by 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in Bryant Elementary found far more bacteria on a school drinking fountain than on a toilet seat in the girls' bathroom.

*If the logos are removed from the machines, neither of the two vendors is willing to enter into the contract...*

--Ron English, District Attorney

*This is the single biggest thing we'll do in advertising.*

--Don Nielsen, School Board Member

*Coca-Cola has no interest in helping fund our public schools. They are interested in Seattle public schools because their market research shows that advertising to young kids is highly effective in building brand loyalty to a certain product at a young age.*

--Andrew Hagelshaw, Center for Commercial-Free Public Education

*Children need adults to take care of them, and set a good example for them. Consider the values you transmit to Seattle's children if you approve the proposed agreement with Coca-Cola: that money is worth more than integrity, that selling out brings no shame, that money is more important than health, that monopoly supersedes nutritional choices.*

--Ralph Nader and Gary Ruskin, Commercial Alert

*The numbers of obese and overweight children are increasing significantly based on national surveys. Less physical activity coupled with a food supply that is plentiful and inexpensive are the likely culprits. Commercialization of society leads people to choose to eat or drink for reasons other than hunger. The Seattle Coke contract, food advertising in the schools and commercial competitive foods sold during meal times in schools all distract our youth from the chance to choose healthy foods when they are truly hungry. It's an outrage.*

--Patricia Manuel, MS, RD, CD

*NO COMMENT*

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