

## 2014 Georgia Middle School Nutrition Policy Data Summary

### **Background**

More than 870,000 children in Georgia were enrolled in public middle and high schools in Georgia during Spring 2014.<sup>1</sup> Students eat one or more meals and/or snacks at school since they typically spend 6-7 hours each day during the school year at school. The school food environment is associated with students' dietary behaviors and obesity.<sup>2,3</sup> Schools can help improve dietary behavior of children by implementing policies and practices conducive to healthful eating behaviors.<sup>4</sup>

### **Data Description**

The School Health Profiles (SHP) is a biennial survey of middle and high school principals and lead health educators (LHEs) in middle and high schools. SHP monitors the status of school health education, physical education, and school health policies related to HIV/AIDS, tobacco use prevention, nutrition, asthma management activities, and family and community involvement in school health.

For the 2014 SHP survey in Georgia, questionnaires were sent to 392 public schools, charter schools, and alternative schools containing any of grades 6 through 12 during spring 2014. Survey responses were received from principals in 77 percent of schools and from LHEs in 72 percent of schools. Because the response rate was greater than 70 percent, the results were weighted and are considered representative of all regular public schools, charter schools, and alternative schools containing at least one of the grades 6 through 12 in Georgia. This summary focuses on Georgia middle schools.

### **Overview of Nutrition Policies and Practices**

SHP survey data showed that among Georgia's middle schools in 2014:

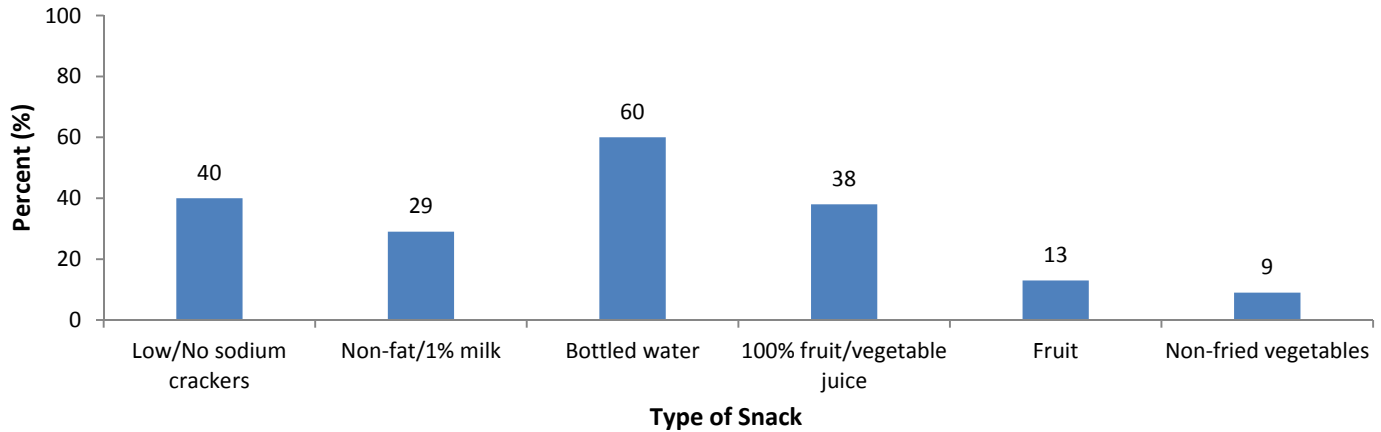
- Only 8 percent allow students to purchase fruits and vegetables from vending machines or at a school store or canteen.
- 31 percent offer fruits or non-fried vegetables when foods or beverages are offered at school celebrations.
- 52 percent do not sell less healthy foods and beverages, such as soda, sports drinks, baked goods, salty snacks, and candy.
- 60 percent have used the School Health Index (available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/shi/>) or other self-assessment tool to assess school nutrition policies, activities and programs.
- 64 percent have a vending machine where students can purchase snack foods or beverages.
- Lead health educators in 76 percent of schools **would like to receive** professional development on nutrition and dietary behavior.
  - Lead health educators in 26 percent of schools **received** professional development on nutrition and dietary behavior during the past two years.
- 91 percent currently have a Coordinator for school health and safety programs.
- 91 percent permit students to have a drinking water bottle with them during the school day.



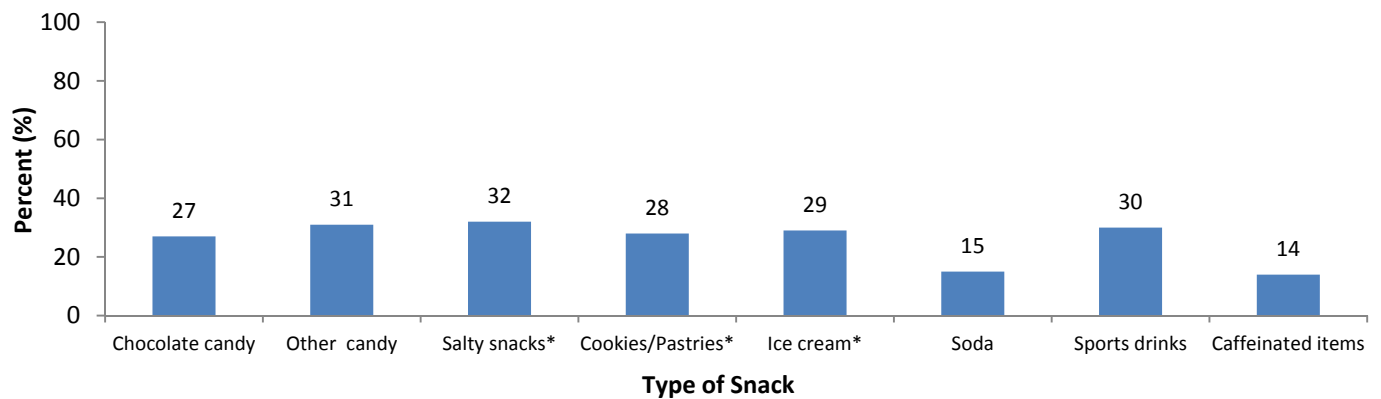
## School Food and Beverage Purchasing Policies

- 60 percent of Georgia’s middle schools provided bottled water for purchase (Chart 1).
- Less than half made low or no sodium crackers, non-fat or 1% milk, 100% fruit or vegetable juice, fresh fruits, and non-fried vegetables available for purchase (Chart 1).
- Less than 50 percent of middle schools made less healthy food and beverage choices available to purchase (Chart 2).

**Chart 1. Percent of Georgia middle schools that allow students to purchase *more* healthy snacks , 2014**



**Chart 2. Percent of Georgia middle schools that allow students to purchase *less* healthy snacks, 2014**

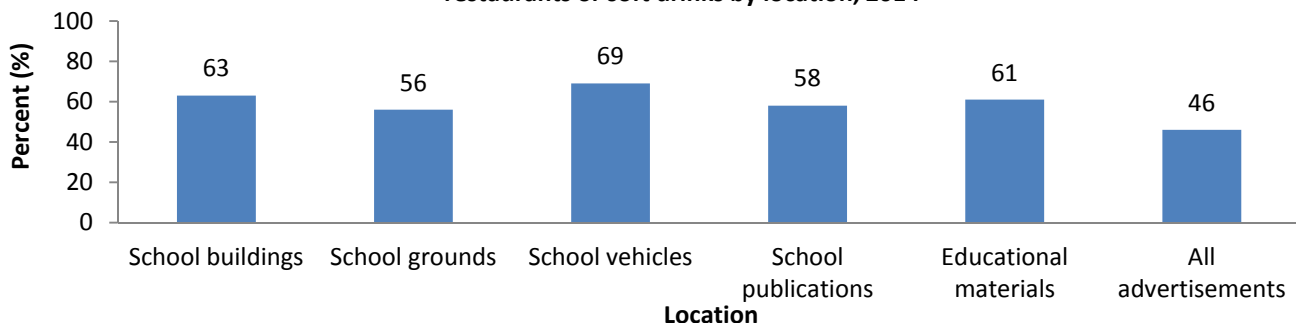


\*Not low in fat

## School Advertisement Policies

- Only 46 percent of Georgia’s middle schools prohibit all forms of advertising and promotion for candy, fast food restaurants and soft drinks (Chart 3).
- More than 50 percent of middle schools prohibit advertisements for candy, fast food restaurants or soft drinks in the school building, on school grounds, in school vehicles, in school publications, or in educational material (Chart 3).

**Chart 3. Percent of Georgia middle schools that prohibit advertisements for candy, fast food restaurants or soft drinks by location, 2014**



## Supportive School Nutrition Environment Strategies

- 87 percent of LHEs tried to increase student knowledge of nutrition and dietary behaviors.
- Only 24 percent of Georgia’s middle schools have implemented at least three strategies to promote a supportive school nutrition environment.
- Less than 50 percent of Georgia’s middle schools have implemented most of the supportive school nutrition environment strategies (Table 1).
- The only two strategies implemented in a majority of middle schools are placing fruits and vegetables near the cafeteria cashier (73 percent) and using attractive displays for fruits and vegetables (70 percent).

**Table 1. Percent of Georgia middle schools that have implemented supportive school nutrition environment strategies during the current school year, 2014\***

Strategy	Percent (%)
Priced nutritious foods and beverages at a lower cost while increasing the price of less nutritious foods and beverages	8
Prohibited school staff from giving students food or food coupons as a reward for good behavior or good academic performance	16
Offered a self-serve salad bar to students	16
Prohibited less nutritious foods and beverages from being sold for fundraising purposes	24
Planted a school food or vegetable garden	28
Conducted taste tests to determine food preferences for nutritious items	30
Served locally or regionally grown foods in the cafeteria or classrooms	39
Labeled healthful foods with appealing names	41
Collected suggestions from students, families and school staff on nutritious food preferences and strategies to promote healthy eating	42
Provided information to students or families on the nutrition and caloric content of foods available	50
Used attractive displays for fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria	70
Placed fruits and vegetables near the cafeteria cashier, where they are easy to access	73

\*For more information on strategies to create a supportive nutrition environment, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s [School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity](#)

## Family and Community Involvement

*Families and communities play important roles in improving nutritional behavior of students.*

- In 31 percent of middle schools, students’ families helped develop or implement policies and programs related to school health during the past two years.
- 52 percent of middle schools have a school health council, committee or team that offers guidance on the development of policies or coordinates activities on health topics.
- Among schools with school health councils, committees or teams:
  - 35 percent had community members represented.
  - 46 percent had parents or families of students represented.
- 44 percent of Georgia’s middle schools provided parents and families with health information designed to increase knowledge of nutrition and healthy eating.
- 59 percent of LHEs gave students homework assignments or health education activities to do at home with their parents during the current school year.

## How Can Schools Improve Student Nutrition?

**By designing and implementing health education curricula:** Effective health education curricula provide students with functional health information that helps them to develop the essential health skills necessary to adopt, practice and maintain healthy behaviors.<sup>5</sup> Such curricula incorporate learning strategies, teaching methods and materials that are age- and developmentally-appropriate, and culturally inclusive.<sup>5</sup> Implementation of effective health education also includes providing continuing education and training for health education teachers.<sup>6,7</sup>

**By providing healthy and safe school environments:** Healthy school environments help improve dietary behavior and prevent overweight among youths.<sup>8</sup> Components of a healthy school environment include increasing the availability of healthful foods such as fruits and vegetables in snack bars and vending machines, restricting the sale of foods high in fat, sodium and added sugars, and beverages containing caffeine on school grounds, and providing students with access to safe, free drinking water throughout the school day.<sup>9,10</sup>

**By incorporating family and community involvement:** This provides an effective integrated approach for improving the health and well-being of students. School health interventions aimed at improving student health outcomes are more effective when they involve parents and community organizations.<sup>11</sup> It also ensures that parents are more involved in school health activities and communicate more effectively with school staff about their children's health.<sup>12</sup>

## References

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