

Study shows parents back junk-food ban in schools

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Paul Veugelers

(PhysOrg.com) -- The issues surrounding children being overweight or obese plague society. In fact, the prevalence of these rates has tripled in the past three decades. But the University of Alberta's Paul Veugelers and Marg Schwartz are working to help kids stay fit and healthy, and a new study shows thousands of parents are also on board.

The researchers in the U of A's [School](#) of Public Health surveyed parents of Grade 5 students in a number of schools across the province and asked their thoughts on banning or limiting unhealthy foods in schools.

There was no surprise among the researchers when 94 per cent of the 3,665 parents surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed to limit the

availability of [junk food](#) like chips, chocolate bars, candy and french fries. Thirty-nine per cent of parents even went as far to say they'd support banning unhealthy foods completely.

"Schools often feel that parents will not support programs that do not address the core academic subjects," said Schwartz. "This study will help schools understand that parents will strongly support the implementation of [physical activity](#) programs and the development of nutrition policy."

Parents' overwhelming support was not limited to policies that promote [healthy eating](#) in schools. In fact, 98 per cent want schools to adhere to the provincially mandated daily physical activity initiative that requires students to be physically active for 30 minutes each day.

It turns out students, too, may not mind limited access to junk foods and want to be more active. The same sample of Grade 5 students were surveyed and asked how important healthy eating and physical activity was to them: over 93 per cent are "quite a lot" or "very much" concerned with being healthy and, overwhelmingly, the 3,421 students surveyed cared about eating healthy foods and being physically active.

"I think we were validated more than surprised [by the results]," said Schwartz. "We have found children to be very responsive to healthy eating and physical activity when the whole school is involved. It's very encouraging. Kids need healthy schools to help turn the tide on many chronic diseases that are starting at younger and younger ages."

Alberta was the first province to implement the daily physical activity initiative, which requires students to take part in 30 minutes of physical activity a day at school. The province is ahead of the country when it comes to getting kids healthy, but Veugelers and Schwartz say school boards don't have to wait for the province when it comes to healthy activity at school.

"Many of the school jurisdictions are in the process of developing nutrition policy based on the Alberta Health and Wellness nutrition guidelines," said Schwartz. "Both of the major boards in Edmonton are in the middle of the process as we speak."

And [parents](#) need to hop on board as well.

"They can provide a supportive home environment and ensure that the existing policies and guidelines (including the daily physical activity initiative) are implemented at their student's school," said Schwartz.

"They can run fundraisers at school that do not involve unhealthy foods, they can provide hot lunches at schools that meet guidelines and they can reward their children with something other than candy, pop and junk food."

Provided by University of Alberta ([news](#) : [web](#))

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