

Death of the bake sale: New rules mean healthier fundraisers

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When it comes to school fundraisers, bake sale tables loaded with sugary goodies are out. Fun runs, auctions and sales of healthier treats are in.

Government rules requiring schools to hold more nutritious fundraisers, along with a trend toward healthier eating in schools, could mean trouble for the long-beloved bake sale. In response, schools are selling everything from fruit to kid-friendly shoe laces.

Many schools say they have been successful in ditching the unhealthier models.

In Dallas, physical education teacher Sharon Foster says her school, James Bowie Elementary, stopped selling chocolate bars and started selling Y-Ties—elastic shoe laces that don't have to be tied. Parent Susan Fox Pinkowitz said she helped her children's elementary school, University Park Elementary in Denver, move from a candy-filled annual carnival to a fun run and carnival that offers apples and protein nut bars. She said the new fundraiser brings in as much as \$12,000 annually, three or four times the amount raised by the old event.

Not everyone is on board. Missy Latham, a parent in Greenville, South Carolina, says bake sales are a profitable part of the "spirit week" celebrations in her district. "It's kind of absurd that one week a year you couldn't sell something like that without the government mandating that it's OK," Latham said.

The Agriculture Department rules, which kicked in last summer, require all foods sold in schools during the day, including at fundraisers, to meet certain nutrition standards. That means limits on brownies, pizza and doughnuts being sold to pay for school activities. The federal rules allow states to seek exemptions for an "infrequent" number of fundraisers, but fewer than half have asked for them, according to the National Association of State Boards of Education. USDA left it up to states to define "infrequent."

Kristen Amundson, the association's director, says the group has been asking state boards to give careful thought to whether they need to seek exemptions. "Do you really want a bake sale every day, 180 days a year?" Amundson said. "Maybe, but probably not."

The idea is to prevent frequent junk-food fundraisers that fill kids up and divert them—and their dollars—from healthier foods in the cafeteria and elsewhere in school. Congress passed the fundraiser standards in 2010, and they are part of a larger government effort championed by first lady Michelle Obama to make all foods sold in schools healthier.

Some states have pushed back. Last summer, Georgia decided that each school could have 30 fundraisers a year that don't meet the nutrition standards, and that each of those fundraisers could last at least three days. Officials said the federal rules were overreach.

South Carolina and Oklahoma have approved a similar number of exemptions. In Oklahoma, a group of students from Edmond North High School brought cookies to a meeting with the state school board, where they told officials they make more than \$40,000 a year from food sales for their charity drives, according to junior Rachel Funderburk. The board listened and allowed 30 fundraisers per semester per school in the state.

Last week, Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Diane Douglas said the state would move to exempt fundraisers after she heard that a school couldn't sell snow cones. "The thought that a federal bureaucrat knows better than parents what they can feed their own families is condescending and reprehensible," Douglas said.

In all, 22 states have asked for exemptions, according to the state education boards group.

The federal rules don't apply to food that is intended to be consumed at home or outside of [school](#)—so kids can still sell fundraiser mainstays like frozen pizza, frozen cookie dough and [chocolate bars](#). USDA recently issued a guidance that clarified that sales of treats like Girl Scout Cookies are still allowed, but it encouraged organizations to deliver the foods late in the day, when parents can take them home.

In Klamath Falls, Oregon, [elementary school](#) principal Tony Swan says most parents are pleased that annual activity-a-thons have replaced chocolate bar sales. Kids had to lug heavy loads of chocolate around, and some kids even ate the product, costing precious dollars. "You're getting 100 percent profit" with activity-based fundraisers, he said.

Companies that sell to schools are adjusting. Krispy Kreme spokeswoman Lafeea Watson says the company is testing sales of other items beyond doughnuts, including vouchers for local stores, coffee sales and collectibles with the company's insignia.

California-based Bolthouse Farms is advertising its fruit and vegetable snack products by giving some schools money and recipes for healthier fundraisers—including apples made into turtle shapes and skewers of berries made to look like magic wands.

"This gives people a vision of what's possible instead of just fighting

these rules," said Jeff Dunn, the company's CEO.

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