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EDUCATION AND NUTRITION
Soda Ban Means Change at Schools

Policy Bolsters Regional Systems That Already Limited Sales

By [Mary Otto and Lori Aratani](#)
Washington Post Staff Writers
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In the corridor of Atholton High School in Columbia, the three drink machines shine like an oasis at the end of the day.

As the school bell rings, teenagers swarm them. The big red Coke machine in the center gets Angelia DiGiuseppe's dollar. Coke and Mountain Dew, she explained, help her study.

"I use soda a lot," she said, "to stay up."

But the days of buying sugar-laden soft drinks at school are officially numbered. Yesterday, the beverage industry announced that it will voluntarily remove the high-calorie sodas from all schools, under an agreement with anti-obesity groups led by former president Bill Clinton.

The pact will probably bolster efforts in Washington area school systems -- many of which have been on the forefront of policing what students are eating and drinking. The District and Fairfax and Montgomery counties, among others, ban the sale of soft drinks during the school day.

Such efforts are cutting into the revenues that schools receive from vending machines, principals say, and the national agreement will doubtless accelerate that trend.

"The money is important, but not as important as kids' health," said Sean Bulson, principal at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School.

The national pact restricts the sale of drinks in elementary schools to water, milk and lower-calorie juices in containers no larger than eight ounces. In middle schools, those drinks can be 10 ounces.

In high schools, the drink size will be limited to 12 ounces. No sugary sodas will be sold, and half the drinks offered will be water or low-calorie beverages, such as diet soda. Sport drinks will be allowed if they have fewer than 100 calories.

"I think it's a great step in the right direction," said Robin Ziegler, chief of school and community nutrition programs for the Maryland State Department of Education.

Last year, the Maryland Board of Education adopted a nutritional policy that asked schools to limit the sale of foods with minimal nutritional value such as candy and soda to after-school hours. Twenty-two of the 24 school districts have adopted the policy, said Ziegler, who spoke while at a conference focused on a strategy for cutting obesity at all ages.

Similarly, Virginia state school regulations prohibit the sale of non-nutritional drinks and snacks while school meals are being sold. But state Department of Education spokesman Charles B. Pyle said yesterday that he was unsure how the agreement will play out in local communities. "What a school sells is still a local matter," he said, and the sale of such things as soft drinks is often used to supplement programs parents

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want in their schools. "It's part of school culture," he said.

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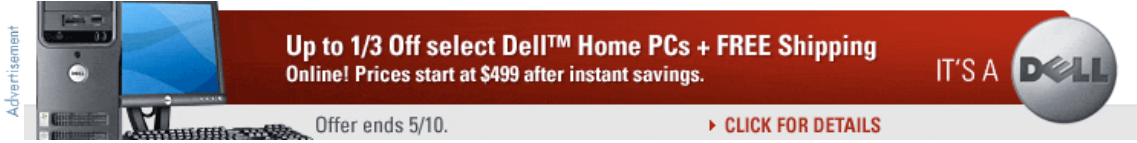
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