

**Testimony of Mary Sophos
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Grocery Manufacturers Association**

Subcommittee on Health

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

U.S. House of Representatives

“Innovations in Addressing Childhood Obesity”

December 16, 2009

Good Morning. My name is Mary Sophos and I am the Senior Vice President and Chief Government Affairs Officer for the Grocery Manufacturers Association. GMA represents more than 300 food, beverage and consumer product companies

Obesity is a serious and complex challenge. As you know, in the U.S. two thirds of adults are overweight or obese and nearly one third of children are overweight or obese. The health and quality of life consequences of these obesity trends on our citizens, our health care system and our nation are significant and must be addressed successfully. The current incidence of childhood obesity is of particular concern.

Multiple strategies and the commitment of many stakeholders will be necessary to reduce childhood obesity. GMA and its members have and will continue to do our part and will continue to support and encourage partnerships including those with the public sector, the private sector, parents and others. In particular, government and industry must do more to create and encourage healthier choices and physical activity -- at school, at home, and in our communities. All of us must do more to promote the concept of energy balance – balancing calories consumed as part of a healthful diet with calories expended through physical activity. The difference between energy consumed and energy burned is the equation that defines the obesity epidemic. Supporting individuals in attaining and maintaining a healthy energy balance should be the focus of our collective efforts.

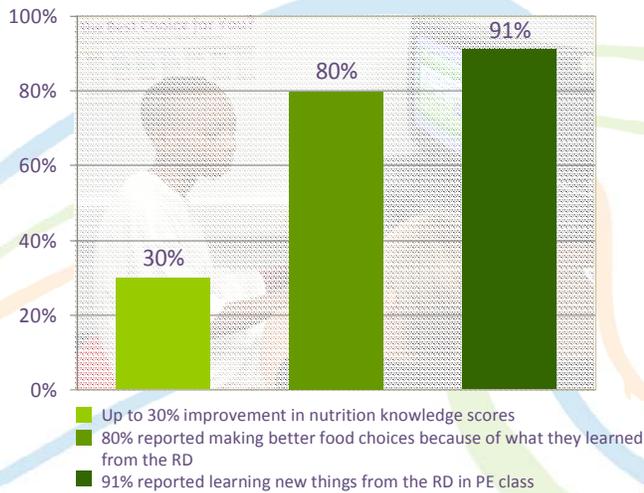
The food and beverage industry already has taken significant steps to create and encourage healthier choices. In recent years, we have changed our packaging to promote portion control and we have reformulated more than 10,000 products to reduce or remove saturated fats, trans fats, calories, sugar and sodium.

We also have changed our advertising to children to promote healthier choices. Between 2004 and 2008, children viewed 31% fewer food, beverage and restaurant ads. At the same time, ads viewed shifted to a more healthy mix of products as a result of company initiatives and pledges under the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative. A summary of these positive trends, delivered yesterday before the Federal Trade Commission is attached.

Let me summarize some of the efforts our industry is undertaking with the many stakeholders who will be critical to achieving the goal of reversing the trends in childhood obesity. Three years ago, GMA and its member companies helped create the Healthy Schools Partnership (HSP), a truly innovative program that brings physical education and nutritional professionals together in the classroom to teach students the concept of energy balance. In particular, HSP links nutrition coaches with the successful PE4life program, which has trained thousands of educators and improved the health of millions of children.

Researchers at the University of California at Berkeley found that the four Kansas City schools that linked students with registered dieticians in the weight room, the classroom and the cafeteria and that delivered key messages through posters, morning announcements, and school newsletters significantly increased those students' consumption of healthy foods, such as vegetables. The researchers also found that those students possessed a far better understanding of how to maintain a healthy body weight. The addition of nutrition education in an integrated curriculum builds on the already impressive fitness and academic results charted by the PE4life program. More detailed results of the HSP pilot in Kansas City are included:

HSP Preliminary Findings

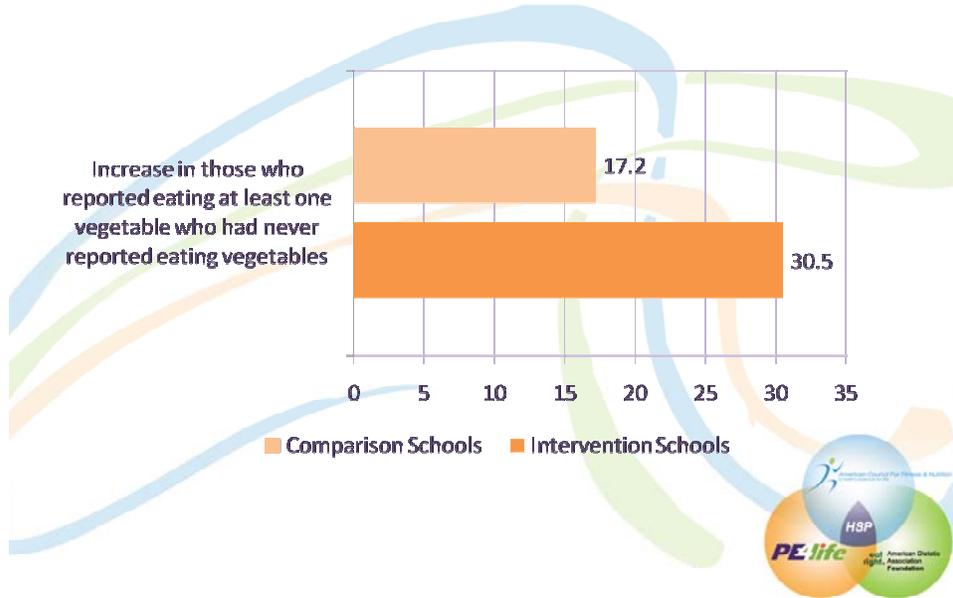


Nutrition Knowledge: percent of students with correct responses at baseline follow-up

	Intervention Schools		Comparison Schools	
	Baseline	Follow-up	Baseline	Follow-up
Identifying a way to maintain a healthy weight	51.4	82.9	50.0	50.5
Understanding the concept of "vary your veggies"	10.5	54.8	11.0	11.7



Self-reported food behaviors



Observation of vegetable consumption at school lunch

	Mean at Intervention Schools	Mean at comparison schools	t-test	p value
Change in vegetable scores	0.2902	-0.1656	-4.0673	P<0.0001

American Council on Exercise & Nutrition
 HSP
 PE:life
 American Dietetic Association
 Foundation

This fall, our industry announced a \$20 million, multi-year initiative that includes a substantial expansion (\$8.5 million) of the Healthy Schools Partnership to more schools across America, including schools in the Kansas City and Washington, D.C. metropolitan areas; Des Moines, Iowa and Chicago, Illinois.

This initiative, the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation (HWCF), is a coalition of more than 40 retailers, non-governmental organizations and food and beverage manufacturers supporting a national, multi-year effort designed to help reduce obesity, particularly childhood obesity, by 2015. The HWCF will promote ways to help people achieve a healthy weight through energy balance and focuses on three critical areas: the marketplace, the workplace and schools, as well as undertaking a public education campaign aimed at 6-11 year olds and their care-givers.

In addition to supporting the Healthy Schools Partnership, companies will be undertaking new or enhanced programs to help employees reach and maintain a healthy weight. These measures include providing calorie information and healthier food and beverage options in cafeterias, vending machines and break rooms; providing access to exercise at work; offering weight management programs; and implementing tools to track progress, such as health risk appraisals. The National Business Group on Health will serve as an expert evaluator of these efforts.

Through the HWCF, we will continue to focus on marketplace solutions involving our products, packaging and labeling to make it easier for consumers to manage their calorie intake while preserving or enhancing overall nutrition quality. This will include product reformulation and innovation; portion control strategies; calorie information at point of purchase and providing consumers with information and educational materials.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has agreed to evaluate and report on the progress we are making on these energy balance initiatives in the marketplace.

Mr. Chairman, our industry will do more to meet this complex challenge and we look forward to updating you on the activities of the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation

and the Healthy Schools Partnership in the coming months. We think it is very important that solutions be evidence-based and therefore all the initiatives under the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation include the use of objective, outside, expert evaluators.

At the same time, the public sector must do much more if we want these innovative programs that are producing positive changes in schools, workplaces and communities to be adopted on a national scale quickly enough to make a significant difference in the foreseeable future.

It is critical that Congress and the states increase investments in physical education, nutrition education, and encourage changes in the built environment. In particular, policymakers should explore ways to support and encourage workplace wellness programs that recognize and reward improvements in health among employees. Many companies in our industry have found that incentives to measure and promote healthier choices and more physical activity within their workplaces have dramatically reduced their health care costs. Encouraging and rewarding adults who make better choices at work will positively affect the choices parents make at home, which is ultimately the most important setting to foster healthy eating habits and to encourage physical activity.

This year, our industry worked with you to pass the most sweeping food safety legislation in a century. Now, we are committed to working with you to put into place the policies and resources that will help combat our nation's obesity epidemic.

ATTACHMENTS:

Healthy Schools Partnership Presentation and UC Berkeley Evaluation
Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation
GMA Presentation to FTC Forum, December 15, 2009