

Commercialism in Schools

One of the negative impacts of commercialism in schools is the continuing epidemic of childhood obesity. Is it the constant advertising in schools that makes the students choose unhealthy eating habits? Or is it something else? We will discuss commercialism in schools and whether or not it is a good thing or a bad thing. Our group will present two perspectives: parents and big business. Javier is taking the parents view and Megan and Patrick are taking the point of view of the big businesses.

The common ground between the parents and the big business is that commercialism is ok to have in schools; however, its content and motives need to be in the right context. Commercialism in schools should be established within a proper framework. The reasoning behind having commercialism in schools should be positive and not negative. Commercialism in schools brings out other issues that affect an individual's health.

Each individual's health is dependent upon his or her own personal choices. Parents want to help their children by giving them foods that are not only healthy, but that are enriched in vitamins and nutrients. Parents want to see their children grow up into healthy adults. To do this parents choose to bring healthy eating habits along with healthy living style. Healthy to parents includes physical education and eating the right foods.

Along with the parent's view of what is healthy, big businesses see healthy in a different light. Big businesses see health in the light of giving support to educational facilities. Big businesses are sometimes the only source of income for schools. Having that kind of influence on schools, big businesses choose what is being served in the cafeteria. Big businesses have the

impact of giving life or health risks to schools in what foods that they possess. Big business is not just the parents of educational facilities, but they are also giving students opportunities to fulfill their dreams. Big businesses give students scholarships to use to complete their educational goals.

Parents and big businesses are two of the key terms that our issue contains. The key terms of our issue are parent, big business, commercialism, food, health, and heart disease. Parents are defined as the persons that not only give life, but who also nurture the child. Big businesses are organizations that work for profit. Food is any nourishing substance that is eaten, drunk, or otherwise taken into the body to sustain life. Health entails possessing or enjoying good health. Heart disease is defined as a structural or functional abnormality of the heart, or of the blood vessels supplying the heart, that impairs its normal functioning.

Commercialization of schools by global corporations is truly not in society's best interest. Commercialization by corporations has many negative affects and health risks on the children that are targeted. The foods and beverages advertised and sold to children at school present added risks for obesity, diabetes, bone fracture, cardiovascular disease, and dental caries. These foods are indirect competition with the school lunch programs and nutritional guidelines set forth by the USDA, as well as the schools' own health curriculums. The commercialization of schools contradicts what the school is intended to do, which is educative children about living healthy. It is unfortunate that some students are even forced to buy these unhealthy products because that is only what id offered by the school.

Corporations are trying to make students life long consumers of their products and perpetuate consumerism and an unhealthy diet. Commercialization of school influences students on what products to purchase and brainwashes youth. The manipulation of words and imagery to

influence behavior is propaganda, so by definition, advertising is antithetical to true education. Given the dearth of systematic media-literacy education, children are ill equipped to cope with sophisticated marketing techniques. American children are already bombarded with ads in the outside world – now even school does not provide a refuge for developing critical thinking.

There are two major points why it is all right for big businesses to move in a pay to get exclusive rights to sell their products in K-12 schools. The first issue is free enterprise. In a free enterprise economy is such an economy that allows businesses to make money on their own terms, with few government rules and regulations. Big businesses such as Coca-Cola or Pepsi have every right to try to make money as long as it's ethical and legal. Companies have been gearing advertising towards children since the beginning of advertising, and now big businesses have found an avenue to make money yet give back to the community. As long as businesses can continue to make money they have an economic right to make that money in a fashion that is appropriate.

The next point regarding big businesses in schools is the good that comes along with the money the businesses put in the schools. There are countless examples of businesses contributing monetarily to schools in need. Schools, who are suffering due to lack of government funding, often look elsewhere for money to help pay for the everyday operations of the school. In many cases these school are in poorer areas where there is no other way to get money. Big businesses or corporations come in and give the school money. In return the school has a contract with that business to exclusive rights on selling their product, and the school receives a certain percentage of the commission received from the sale of that product. Often times, this money goes to help support athletic and after school programs. Businesses also set up scholarship funds to help students reach their academic goals as well as supplying schools with

advanced technology to keep schools up to date. In the long run, business does more good than harm when it comes to their involvement with these schools.

There are a few examples of how big businesses have helped schools encourage healthy eating habits at a young age. Case in point, Dole who announced earlier this year they were launching a program to put fruit vending machines on select high school campuses. Hopefully, this will support healthier eating habits. Another instance is Kellogg who also announced earlier this year it would market food with certain nutritional value in any medium with a large audience of children under the age of 12. This act will hopefully persuade children to make healthier choices at an earlier age so when high school comes along, eating healthier will be like second nature to them.

Big businesses have also helped students who are in financial need. A great case is when First USA, part of the Corporation Bank One, sponsored Chris Barrett and Luke McCabe pay for their dream colleges when all other means had failed. Another way big business helping students is by getting involved in community needs. In August of 2006, Office Max and the local Kiwanis club got together and handed out schools supplies in the Little Havana district of Miami. There are also incentive programs that businesses are parts of that have an enormous impact on students. One such example Megan participated in was called Book Bucks. Every Spring, when morale was a little low at the schools, the local newspaper would run a reading program and a student got so many “book bucks” for reading so many hours. This program was supported by local businesses that would “sell” their products or services to the school children to motivate copious amounts of reading by the young students.

The issue of food corporations’ presence in K-12 schools is a complex one, with points that are made on the part of ethics and health, while still other points are made on the part of

legal business practices. In his presentation, Javier argued that schools are trusted by parents to provide a safe setting conducive to learning for their children, a setting which should include healthy food options, rather than an environment marred by the availability of fatty “junk” food. He also pointed out that exclusive agreements between certain food corporations and schools undermine the healthy diet programs that schools teach and promote. Patrick countered by pointing out that businesses have the right to find a legal way to make money, and thus, from a legal standpoint, the practice is ethical. He also mentioned that the funds garnered through the sale of “junk” food is extremely helpful to the schools; athletic and after-school programs, he stated, are often funded by the profits made from vending machines and food stands. Megan went on to mention examples of big businesses giving back to schools and students in the form of scholarships and other funding. She also pointed out that big agricultural businesses are involved in national campaigns (i.e., “5 a Day” program) that promote healthy diets. The issue remains a divisive one; while the effect of fatty foods’ presence in schools is evident in the prevalence of obesity in school children, the funding that is provided by the profit from selling fatty food is also evident.

Works Cited

- 1) "Business." Dictionary.com 30 Oct. 2007
<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/business>>
- 2) "Commercialism." Dictionary.com 30 Oct. 2007
<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/commercialism>>
- 3) "Food." Dictionary.com 30 Oct. 2007
<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/food>>
- 4) "Health." Dictionary.com 30 Oct. 2007
<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/healthy>>
- 5) "Heart Disease." Dictionary.com 30 Oct. 2007
<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/heart%20disease>>
- 6) "Parent." Dictionary.com 30 Oct. 2007
<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/parent>>
- 7) Barrett, Chris and McCabe, Luke. ChrisandLuke.com. 5 Nov. 2007.
<<http://www.chrisandluke.com/home.html>>
- 8) Boninger, Faith and Molnar, Alex. Buy Me! Buy Me! 2 Oct. 2001. Arizona State University. 23 Oct. 2007. <<http://eps1.asu.edu/ceru/documents/ceru-0110-103/ceru-0110-103.pdf>>.
- 9) Butler-Wall, Brita Ph. D. Risks of Commercializing Education: Why We Need Commercial-Free Schools. Seattle Community Network. 29 Oct. 2007.
<<http://www.scn.org/cccs/risks.pdf>>
- 10) Molnar, Alex. ADRIFT: Schools in a Total Marketing Environment. The Tenth Annual Report Schoolhouse Commercialism Trends: 2006-2007. Arizona State University. 23 Oct. 2007. <<http://www.eps1.asu.edu/ceru/Annual%20reports/EPSL-0710-244-CERU.pdf>>