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In February of 2005, the Miami-Dade County School Board addressed its policy on soft drink sales on campuses. Prompted by warnings from health organizations linking obesity, diabetes, and osteoporosis with juvenile consumption of sodas, many boards throughout the United States have voted to restrict or ban soft drink sales.

Although the Board unanimously confirmed its concern for students' health, members were divided on the actual prohibition of soft drink sales in Miami-Dade schools. Some argued that fundraising efforts are enhanced by soda sales, and that athletic directors fear the further reduction of strapped budgets.

Fundraising is a reality in our schools, but selling sugar-laden beverages is not the answer. In fact, our own superintendent, Dr. Rudy Crew, developed policy in New York that encouraged sellers to substitute healthier beverage choices approved by the medical community. Dr. Crew assures the Board that this is feasible here in Miami-Dade—without harming relationships with soft drink vendors.

The American Beverage Association (ABA), in response to such concerns, and in an introductory effort to self-regulate, has proposed vending policies for school districts and beverage producers that place a greater emphasis on the sale of bottled water, milk products, and 100% juices, particularly in elementary and middle schools.

In its Policy Statement on school beverage sales, the American Academy of Pediatrics includes the following among its recommendations:

- Soft drinks should not be sold as part of or in competition with the school lunch program, as stated in regulations of the US Department of Agriculture.
- Vending machines should not be placed within the cafeteria space where lunch is sold. Their location in the school should be chosen by the school district, not the vending company.
- Vending machines with foods of minimal nutritional value, including soft drinks, should be turned off during lunch hours and ideally during school hours.
- Vended soft drinks and fruit-flavored drinks should be eliminated in all elementary schools.
- Incentives based on the amount of soft drinks sold per student should not be included as part of exclusive contracts.

Curbing soft drink sales is a new direction for a school district that has so entrenched itself into relationships with generous vendors, but the long-term health of our students is at stake. Furthermore, I urge the Board, as a policy making body, to place an outright ban on the sale of carbonated soft drinks in our schools. This is an undeniably critical choice that will affirm our commitment to the wellness of our students. Fundraising is important, but at what cost? Obesity and other chronic diseases are too high a price to pay. Nutrition habits learned in childhood and adolescence shape

students' choices for a lifetime. Therefore we must set a proper example in our taxpayer-supported schools.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marta Perez
Miami-Dade School Board Member

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