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# The Health Advisor

By Brooke Bennett

Last year, New York City's Board of Education (BOE) made a bold step toward improving the health of our children. As part of a successful effort to make school meals healthier, the Office of School Food (OSF) removed whole milk from the citywide school menu and replaced it with 1% (low-fat) and skim (fat-free) milk varieties.

Whole milk is a significant source of saturated fat - the type that contributes to heart disease - in children's diets. Low-fat and skim milk provide all of the nutrients found in whole milk, such as calcium and vitamin D, but with fewer calories and little to no saturated fat.

Most NYC schools offer children three types of milk -1%, skim and chocolate flavored skim - during school meals. In an effort to address high rates of obesity and diabetes among Bronx children, the BOE reduced the number of times per week that students in 55 Bronx elementary schools were offered chocolate flavored skim milk, since it contains added sugar and calories.

The fact is, our children are being manipulated by food producers to become used to food and beverages loaded with sugar, salt, fat and artificial colors that they are turning away from healthier, less processed foods—a habit likely to continue in adulthood.

Due to a 10% drop in students' milk consumption during the past year, the City Council, lobbied by the American Dairy Council, passed a resolution asking the BOE to reintroduce vanilla and strawberry milks in NYC schools in hopes of improving milk consumption rates.

We at REACH believe the nutrition policies implemented in Bronx schools and citywide help create an environment in schools that encourage children to make nutritious food choices and establish healthy eating habits that will follow them into adulthood. The following are a few things that you as parents, caregivers and role models can do to help our children make healthier food choices in their lives:

- Switch to 1% or skim, unsweetened milk at home.
- Tell your schools officials (school principal, parent coordinator, cafeteria staff) to keep serving low fat, unsweetened milk during school meals.

Phone your city council member(s) about keeping the original Office of School Food milk policy of unsweetened, low fat and skim milk in schools.

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