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Many students aren't buying the healthy snacks, fruit juices and water that must now be offered in school vending machines instead of candy, soda and other sugary, high-calorie treats.

That means school districts are losing money on vending machine sales, but some have reported an increase in à la carte sales.

The profits that schools make from vending machine snack sales have gone down by 50 percent since the federal [Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act](#) went into effect in 2010 requiring schools that receive federal food subsidies to serve healthy foods, said Eric Cardonick, president of Advanced Services, a vending company based in Bensalem.

"You can imagine people want a Snickers bar more than a bag of baked chips," said Cardonick.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, and subsequent "[Smart Snacks in Schools](#)" program initiated in the 2014-15 school year, require that "all food sold at school during the school day will need to meet nutrition standards," according to the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service [website](#).

"We have to sell things that meet (the National School Lunch Program) requirements," said Richie Webb, Bristol Township School District director of food services. Requirements include that snacks are whole-grain, and contain 200 calories or less. Their sodium content must be equal to or less than 230 milligrams, and fat content must be 35 percent or less.

For example, the Bristol Township School District used to sell Philadelphia-style soft pretzels with cheese. Now it sells whole wheat pretzels without the cheese to keep them below the 200-calorie limit and reduce their sodium content.

"I can remember having an ice cream and Tastykake for lunch," Webb said. "Those days are gone."

In the Bensalem Township School District, revenue from the vending machines went from about \$140,000 a year before the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act went into effect to about \$40,000 a year now, said district food service coordinator Pauline Welch.

The Neshaminy School District's food vending machines sit empty while the district reviews how to fill them. "Currently, the student (beverage) machines are only stocked with compliant beverages (bottled water, juice, tea). The food vending machines in student areas are currently empty," said spokesman Chris Stanley.

Since students can't get the regular potato chips and sodas that vending machines used to offer, district administrators are seeing them chow down more on the healthy food served at breakfast and lunch. That's good for their waistlines and the schools' bottom lines.

"Our vending revenue has gone down, but food services is breaking even," said Chris Berdnik, business manager for the Centennial School District.

Vending revenue in Centennial went from a high of \$73,925 in the 2009-10 school year to \$29,019 in the 2015-16 school year, but the revenue from healthier à la carte offerings rose from a low of \$294,460 in the 2011-12 school year to \$407,987 in the last school year. That's a revenue increase of \$68,621.

Shannon Stone, Centennial supervisor of food and nutrition, said the district is "offering a lot more à la carte," including fresh fruit selections.

"The kids won. They're really eating fresh food and it's a benefit to our program," Berdnik added.

As she sat down to eat in William Tennent's busy cafeteria Wednesday, Morgan Fertig, 16, of Warminster, said she liked that her school was serving healthier food. "It tastes better and it's better than putting junk food in your body. I like the broccoli and chicken," she said.

Some students also like the low-calorie snacks, including Doritos and popcorn. "I just get the popcorn because it's sweet," said Yusuf Aladinov, 16, of Upper Southampton.

But a student who identified himself as only Chris said, "We should have a choice if we want to eat healthy or not."

And Lesly Villarreal, 15, of Warminster, said 50 cents is too much to pay for a snack bag "filled up with air." She wants the price reduced to 25 cents.

Central Bucks School District officials said the district has no vending machines in its elementary schools and primarily beverage machines — "excluding soda" — in its secondary schools.

"The only snack vending machines are in some of the high schools and one middle school, and they are ice cream vending machines. The ice cream snacks are compliant with the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids regulations," said CB spokeswoman Melanie Sullivan. Vending machines that used to stock trail mix and granola bars were discontinued "due to lack of use."

Webb noted that since the healthy snacks haven't been selling, food manufacturers have been trying to improve the appeal and taste of their low-fat, low-calorie products.

Cardonick agreed. In recent weeks, he's noticed an increase in sales of s'more type treats, fruity snacks that both meet the nutritional requirements and taste more like the candies and high-fat products that vending machines used to carry. "It's another challenge for everybody," he said.

After school, some schools, including Tennent, unlock vending machines that are stocked with candy and regular potato chips since the federal regulations no longer apply then.

Some schools, like Conwell-Egan Catholic High School in the Fairless Hills section of Bristol Township, aren't following the federal guidelines and still sell regular potato chips and soda in vending machines. "(All 10 machines are) all used. I do think the kids love the chips and soda and stuff. A lot of administrators use it, too," said Bill Petraitis, Conwell-Egan's administrative assistant to the president and principal.

Quakertown Community School District Superintendent William Harner said that when the new food guidelines were first introduced, Quakertown students didn't want to go along because it "changed their tastebuds." Now the healthy snacks are going down better, especially with their morning joe.

The Quakertown school district — and Bensalem and Centennial — has been offering coffee to high school students in the morning at special cafés.

Quakertown's new Panther Café offers healthy yogurt parfaits and whole-grain bagels. Administrators plan to add breakfast meals to the café's menu.

Bensalem High School Assistant Principal Steven Louella said the café at his school is very popular.

"A whole bunch of kids buy the coffee. It's really convenient," said Louella. "They like it so much, I hardly get to get mine."

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