

New anti-junk food law in Oregon schools becomes official

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

It's now the law "junk food is being expelled from Oregon's public schools.

In a Wednesday ceremony in his office, Gov. Ted Kulongoski signed into law House Bill 2650, which sets healthy food standards for schools. He congratulated the large group of legislators and health organizations that helped push the bill to passage.

Senator Bill Morrisette, D-Springfield, who has worked for three sessions to pass an anti-junk food law, in turn announced: "For the next step, we'll have a bill next session to establish a Governor's Fitness Program for schools to continue the battle against childhood obesity and fitness-related diseases such as Type 2 diabetes.

Under that planned bill, Morrisette said, the Governor would tour schools in the state, promoting better student fitness. "That gives you two years to get in shape," someone in the signing ceremony crowd said to the grinning Kulongoski.

Experts have been saying for some time that increased consumption of high-fat and/or high-calorie foods by children and less physical activity are responsible for the nearepidemic of obesity among the young.

Concurrent with the signing, the Oregon Nutrition Policy Alliance (ONPA) "which worked HB 2650 through this legislative session, said that final enactment of the bill moves Oregon from a failing grade for its school food policies to an A- grade. The ratings are bestowed by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, which now ranks Oregon as one of only two states and the District of Columbia with the A- rating.

"We hope to work with the schools to make sure the implementation of these standards is easy and consistent," said Mary Lou Henrich, executive director of Community Health Partnership, a founding

member of ONPA.

The bill sets calorie, fat and/or sugar standards that foods must meet before they can be sold in schools. Sugary pop, calorie-loaded candy bars and fat-laden foods will be moved out of school vending machines and ala carte cafeteria lines, with juices and less-fattening candy, and other healthy snacks and foods replacing them.

Many food and drink companies are changing their products to comply with healthy-food standards that are gradually being adopted around the country. Several Oregon school districts, including Eugene and Portland, have already adopted healthy food standards similar to, or exceeding those in HB 2650.

Existing contracts that school districts have with food or drink companies will be allowed to phase out. The bill gives districts without existing contracts until July, 2008, to comply and in the case of food prepared on-site, it gives districts another extra year to comply, to allow them time to adjust to the new standards. It doesn't apply to regular school meals served under the federal school breakfast and lunch programs, which are governed by federal standards.

Morrisette introduced his first anti-junk food bill in the 2003 session, and in the 2005 session was joined by Senator Joanne Verger, D-Coos Bay, in sponsoring a bill. Both bills died in committee. But this session, ONPA signed up 24 Republican and Democratic co-sponsors for the bill and fought off food industry attempts to kill or weaken it.

Members of the alliance include Upstream Public Health, the American Diabetes Association, Oregon Nurses Association, Community Health Partnership, Stand for Children, Oregon Health & Science University, Oregon Medical Association and Oregon Dietetics Association, among others.

Chief legislative co-sponsors in addition to Morrisette and Verger are Rep. Scott Bruun, R-West Linn/Tualatin, and Rep. Tina Kotek, D-Portland.

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