

That's the Way the Cookie Crumbles

By Reg P. Wydeven
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A few weeks ago, our family went to my daughter's sixth grade band concert. While I am unequivocally biased, she truly is an awesome drummer. But her whole band is also truly awesome. While they've only been playing for less than two years, these kids are playing music that is more difficult than what we played in junior high.

We had a fun night with outstanding music. We capped it off by picking up some delicious cookies, brownies and other treats at the school bake sale. Like the band, the chocolate cookies were outstanding. That's why I'm glad the concert was at night – otherwise I would have ended up buying carrots.

Under the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the United States Department of Agriculture was tasked with establishing nutrition standards for all foods and beverages sold to students in school. Dubbed 'Smart Snacks in School,' these nutrition standards encourage schools to offer students healthy foods and beverages, such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables, leaner protein, and lower-fat dairy. In addition, schools are discouraged from offering foods with too much sugar, fat and salt.

The new standards, which went into effect last summer, apply to foods and beverages sold in schools until 30 minutes after the end of the instructional day. Accordingly, the rules apply to school fundraisers held during the school day. Because my in-laws went to my daughter's 2:00 concert, they didn't get to visit the bake sale.

Because bake sales are a time honored tradition, not to mention a great way to raise money, the USDA allows states to seek exemptions for an "infrequent" number of fundraisers, and to further define how many bake sales constitute "infrequent." According to the National Association of State Boards of Education, however, less than half of the states have sought exemptions.

Wisconsin is one of the 22 states that has asked for an exemption. While there are no limits on fundraisers held during the school day that sell foods and beverages that meet the Smart Snacks nutrition standards, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School Nutrition Team defined "infrequent" fundraisers as two per school year, each lasting up to two consecutive weeks.

Other states have a big sweet tooth, such as Georgia, which decided that each school could have up to 30 fundraisers a year that don't comply with the nutrition standards, and that each of those fundraisers could last at least three days. South Carolina and Oklahoma adopted a similar number of exemptions.

In addition to exemptions, the Smart Snacks in School rules don't apply to food that is intended to be consumed at home or outside of school. Therefore, kids can still sell things like frozen pizzas, popcorn kernels and cookie dough. The USDA also recently issued guidelines clarifying the sale of treats like Girl Scout Cookies. These types of sales are still allowed, but the Department encourages organizations to deliver the foods late in the day, when parents can take them home.

I think instead of bake sales, the band should sell CDs of their performances. I bet they'd sell like hotcakes.

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