

One of the primary duty as a parent is to protect our kids and help pave their future. From the moment, our kids come into our lives; we spend countless hours protecting them from any possible harm. As a parent of Eisenhower Elementary School, this too is my goal. Each day we use our best judgment to help steer our kids in the right direction and shield them from any possible danger. But even with our best effort, the threat is closer than it seems. Childhood obesity is a nationwide epidemic but directly affects our kids each day at this school. In a shocking article published in *The Lancet* in 2010, "every other child in the USA now has a body-mass index (BMI) at or above 85th centile on age-specific national growth charts for ideal weight gain" (*The Lancet*, 2010). One of the leading contributing factor to childhood obesity is sugar-packed beverages, and it is readily available in kid's daily lunch program. Until we find a healthy alternative, sugary juices are causing our kids to be obese, and their health is possibly in jeopardy.

The original lunch program introduced in 1946 was to standardize meal plans to provide healthily and balance meals for all children attending public school. With the advancement of nutritional science, the program has evolved but hasn't gone far enough. In a study conducted in 2008 by *The New England Journal of Medicine* reveals that the kids were eating far fewer fruits and vegetables and consuming high amounts of refined grains. The study also shows that the kids ate 500 excess calories from solid fats and added sugar per day. That is approximately 3500 extra calories a week and possibly gaining a pound of fat per week, and there are 36 weeks in an academic school year. It is an incredible number of extra calories that our kids are consuming.

In an article *The Role of Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption in Adolescent Obesity: A Review of Literature*, author Susan Harrington writes, "56 - 85% of children in school consume at least one soft drink daily. The odds ratio of becoming obese among children increases 1.6 times for each additional can or glass of sugar-sweetened drink consumed beyond their usual daily intake of the beverage."

Childhood obesity is a nationwide epidemic that hasn't received the much-needed attention. In an article published in *The Lancet*, the author states "children whose BMIs were in the top quartile at the mean age of 11 years were more than twice likely to die before the age of 55" (*The Lancet*, 2010). This alarming statistic mean if child's body-mass index ranks higher than average, their life expectancy can be drastically reduced.

Each morning we drop off our kids at school and believe that our kids are in good hands. Their well-being left in the hands of administrators and academic program that guides it. The part of this educational program is a national lunch program.

This preventable disease is affecting all kids across the country Childhood obesity is affecting your kids, and it's happening in our schools. An article published in the Lancet in 2010 points out that This alarming rate of childhood obesity is not just happening elsewhere, but it's happening here, to our kids. The main contributing factor is sugar-packed beverages.

As part of the current lunch program in elementary school, kids are offered a choice between milk or juice. Unless you grew up in a household that doesn't allow sugary juice, the choice is fairly obvious. In middle school and high school, vending machines stand tall throughout the campus dispensing sodas without discrimination.

So once again, it's time to stand up and take a stand. Just as we did with the tobacco company, we need to rise together and protect our kids. Our future. If we work together with the school administrators and board of directors, we can explore alternative solutions to sugar-packed drinks in our kid's lunch and healthy alternatives in the vending machines. We can make a positive change for our kids. It's time to cover the corners of tables, electrical outlets, and lock the kitchen cabinets one more time. It's time for a change.

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Let's step back and reflect on an event that took place not too long ago.

It's a known fact that carcinogens and other chemicals contained inside of a cigarette have a detrimental and irreversible effect on our bodies. The tobacco companies have fought hard to dispute this fact for decades but ultimately conceded to science. We now have laws prohibiting underage kids from purchasing any tobacco products. New education programs introduced in schools, commercials on TV, radios blasted catchy slogans, and other mediums used to inform the general public. According to The Journal of Medical Association, we now have fewer underage smokers than ever before. (The JAMA Network, 2003) We took a stand to protect our kids, and we succeeded.