

- The following brief reports the effects of junk food counter-marketing policies on the reduction of childhood obesity prevalence in the state of Louisiana, from an evidence-based modeling program.
- This policy intervention reflects a well-planned statewide effort to deter junk food consumption through adjustments in product marketing.
- Policies primarily encompass one or more of these counter-marketing strategies:
  - anti-junk food media campaigns
  - less prominent product placement of junk foods
  - local communication, such as point-of-purchase signage and nutrition or menu labeling to promote healthy foods

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### Policy Goals

- Replace junk foods with healthy alternatives and reduce overall consumption of junk food.
- Make healthy foods more appealing beverage and snack options.
- Provide support for food stores and schools that remove junk food advertising and increase healthy food marketing through media and high-visibility product placement.

### What Does the Research Tell Us?

- Evidence has linked junk food advertising exposure to children's junk food preferences, purchases, and consumption,<sup>87,88</sup> as well as overweight status.<sup>89</sup>
- Advertising for junk food on television<sup>87,90-94</sup> and on outdoor billboards<sup>95</sup> has been associated with obesity.
- Interventions at the point-of-purchase (e.g. unfavorable signage and nutrition labeling) have reduced junk food consumption.<sup>5,96</sup>
- Evidence is needed to establish a link between junk food counter-marketing and junk food consumption.

### Current Policy Environment in Louisiana

- There are no state-endorsed mass media campaigns or social marketing strategies employed to discourage junk food consumption in Louisiana.
- Louisiana does not have any laws or policies that restrict junk food placement or that promote healthy food messages in grocery stores, schools, or restaurants.<sup>97,98</sup>

## What is Food Marketing?

Food marketing/promotion: any activity conducted by a company in the food, beverage, or restaurant industry to encourage purchase of its products.<sup>99</sup>

**\$10,000,000,000**

Food companies spend \$10 billion *per year* marketing foods and beverages to children and adolescents in the United States.<sup>87</sup>

A high percent (up to 90%) of foods advertised during children's television shows are for convenience/fast foods and for foods high in fat, sodium, sugar or low in nutrients.<sup>100-103</sup>

American children spend nearly \$30 billion of their own money on junk food every year.<sup>103</sup>

## WAYS TO SUPPORT

### Junk Food Counter-Marketing

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- Designate healthy restaurants and/or healthy menu options.
- Encourage menu nutrition labeling.
- Promote mass media campaigns about health effects of junk foods.
- Discourage junk food signage, promotions, and placement at points-of-purchase.
- Regulate the amount of advertising children are exposed to in their schools and neighborhood.
- Ban junk food advertisements during prime children's television watching hours and during children's shows.

## Achieving Maximum Intervention Results

- The initial conditions in Louisiana were estimated by gauging the strength of placement restrictions and local marketing in schools, food stores, and restaurants. Because Louisiana does not have any policies or laws supporting junk food counter-marketing measures, the initial conditions were set to the lowest value (0%).
- Maximum intervention (100%) entails an effective, extensive, focused, an ongoing mass media counter-marketing campaign; local communication in schools, food stores, and restaurants; and less prominent product placement of junk food in these settings.



## Projected Effect on Louisiana's Childhood Obesity Prevalence

PRISM Results: Can a Policy Intervention Reducing the Marketing Power of Junk Foods Reduce the Prevalence of Childhood Obesity?				
Policy Strength	Maximum (100%)	Maximum (100%)	Moderate (50%)	Moderate (50%)
Year Implemented	2013	2016	2013	2016
% Change [ROU <sup>^</sup> ]	↓ 4% [2-7%]	↓ 3% [2-5%]	↓ 2% [1-4%]	↓ 2% [1-3%]

<sup>^</sup> ROU refers to the Range of Uncertainty determined by the PRISM sensitivity analysis.

Note: The symbol ↓ signifies that the percent change is negative, and the percent represents a decrease.

- Small reductions in the childhood obesity prevalence may be possible with effective junk food counter-marketing interventions.
- A 2-4% reduction in the childhood obesity prevalence may not seem substantial, but any decrease means that a number of children may be protected from the effects of overweight/obesity.

## Implementing the Policy

Junk food counter-marketing is a relatively new policy intervention that communities are implementing. It is no secret that children and adolescents are major targets for food and beverage marketing campaigns, especially for fast food, sugary cereals, soda, and other junk foods. And it is known that food and beverage advertising affects children's food preferences and purchase requests, short-term consumption habits, and contributes to less-healthy diets and an environment that puts kids' health at risk.<sup>87</sup> While food companies have decreased the money spent on traditional television advertising, strategies have evolved to include the Internet and other forms of technology and social media (e.g. text messaging, social networking sites/apps) to attract and retain young customers.<sup>104</sup> Although some companies have pledged to self-regulate and have taken positive action in terms of marketing foods to children,<sup>105</sup> as businesses, their main priority is profit, not public health.

In accordance with the U.S. Congress passing Section 204 of Public Law 108-265, of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004,<sup>106</sup> some school districts in Louisiana have adopted language in their mandatory wellness policy that "strongly discourages" marketing of low-nutrition foods and beverages at school.<sup>107</sup>

! A ban on marketing obesogenic foods (i.e. junk foods) to children is one of the single most effective and cost-saving policy strategies a government can implement.<sup>110</sup>

! Section 4205 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act requires chain restaurants to post calorie information for menu items and the level of recommended daily calories that should be eaten.<sup>6</sup>

However, the policies are voluntarily adopted on a district-by-district basis, and only **discourage** marketing, but do not **prohibit** it. According to a CDC report in 2010, 61.6% of schools in Louisiana completely prohibit the selling of unhealthy foods (e.g. candy, fast food, and soft drinks) in all locations affiliated with the schools (school grounds, gymnasiums, school buses, sports fields).<sup>108</sup> As schools face budget cuts and seek additional revenue, they are caught in a dilemma, as competitive food and beverage sponsorships can be difficult to turn down.<sup>109</sup> With the help of policy makers and industry leaders, schools can be important places to market nutritious foods and healthy diets.

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