



Earlimart School District

# ELIMINATING ELECTROLYTE REPLACEMENT BEVERAGES

CASE STUDY | SUMMER 2011

## Demographics:

- K-8 district serving 2,000 students at 3 sites.
- Student Ethnicity: 96 percent Hispanic; 2 percent Filipino, 2 percent (combined) White, Asian, Pacific Islander, African American and Other
- Serves 3,000 meals (breakfast and lunch) per day on average
- 95 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals

## Background

The Earlimart School District is one of the few districts that never sold electrolyte replacement beverages (ERBs) – sugar added sports drinks. The major challenge facing district food services over the years has been resisting vendors and occasionally teachers and staff members, who have attempted to convince the school district to sell these types of sugar-sweetened beverages.

“Vendors constantly knock on our door to sell sugar-sweetened beverages like carbonated fruit drinks, sports drinks and other miscellaneous food items that should not be allowed to be sold to students,” said Clint Lara, Earlimart’s Food Service Director. “The decision to keep them off our campuses is easy: why start selling an item that may soon be banned? Given the strict State of California nutrition standards, when you add another variable into the mix such as an electrolyte replacement beverage, the task becomes more difficult to stay in compliance with the standards.”

## Results

“Our bread and butter funding is the reimbursable school meal. We are currently serving a population that has a 95% free and reduced lunch rate, so adding competing products like chips, cookies or other beverages only decreases sales of fully reimbursable and more nutritious meals,” Clint said. “My opinion is that a school district with a high free and reduced rate like ours should focus on the reimbursable meal. Hard economic times have pushed more families below the income threshold to qualify so more children are participating in the meal program.”

As far as the bottom line is concerned, Clint sees no financial incentive to sell sugar-sweetened beverages.

“The 16.9 ounce bottled water sold to students is just as profitable and is a healthier option,” explained Clint. “For our district we have to ask why would a child or family spend two or three dollars on a sports drink when they can purchase a bottle of water for one dollar or an extra milk for a quarter? We would be doing a disservice to families and to ourselves by selling electrolyte replacement beverages.”



## CASE STUDY

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### Policy Implications

Earlimart School District’s original local school wellness policy, which was adopted in June 2006, did not specifically forbid the sale of ERBs. In order to strengthen and clarify existing policy language, Clint and Wellness Committee members Susan Elizabeth of the Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program and Jane Alvarado of California Project LEAN worked on revising the district’s wellness policy language.

This revised Wellness Policy, approved by the Earlimart School Board in June 2011, contains requirements for all items for sale to students outside the meal programs through vending machines, in the cafeteria a la carte lines, fundraisers and school stores. The policy states that beverages may not contain any added sweeteners – caloric or non-caloric – with the exception of non-dairy milk alternatives (e.g., almond, rice, soy milks). Additionally, no beverages may contain additives such as flavorings, minerals (e.g., electrolytes), or stimulants (e.g., caffeine). Only the following beverages are allowed: water with no additives; unflavored, non-fat or 1% cow’s milk; unflavored non-dairy milk alternatives; and fruit or vegetable juice that contains at least 50% juice.

Additionally, the policy commits to increasing and promoting drinking water as an essential component of student wellness by providing all students and

employees with access to clean, safe, palatable drinking water free of charge at every District facility, allows students to bring drinking water from home and into the classrooms, and encourages school administrators, teachers, and other staff to model drinking water. The policy states the district will perform maintenance and testing of all water fountains regularly and as needed, with test results available in an easily accessible format.

Earlimart School District’s Wellness Policy revisions help to create a healthy environment for students and staff and reduce the amount of sugar consumed by students during the school day.

### Advice for Other Districts

“If a school really wants to make a change and is on a traditional schedule, I would recommend making the change during the summer and starting fresh with the new school year. However a district our size could feasibly make this change any time during the school year,” noted Clint. “Replace all ERBs with the standard 16.9 fluid ounce water, simple as that. The profit is high, it’s healthy, and it won’t affect the nutritional component of the meal program.”

### For more information contact:

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