

e-Edition Plus

A current events feature for teaching with electronic editions.

By Emilia Pastina

Kids' meals toys targeted in battle against obesity

This is as close to a sure thing as you will ever find:

Whenever a character that kids like appears in a new movie, it soon will become a toy and be given out alongside a burger and fries at restaurants.

Kids' meals served by fast food and other restaurants are popular for their prizes, and in 2006 alone the Federal Trade Commission found that \$360 million was spent on toys for kids' meals in America.

But in 2008 the Center for Science in the Public Interest found that 10 out of 12 meals that included the toy items also came with something else — higher-than-recommended amounts of calories for kids.

Now, a California county is doing something never tried before. Officials in Santa Clara County have voted to ban giving away toys and other items with kids' meals that don't meet nutritional standards, such as those with more than 485 calories and too much salt, fat and sugar.

Not everyone likes this. The California Restaurant Association, which represents 22,000 restaurants, worked to defeat the new rule, took out ads in local newspapers and conducted a poll that it said showed a large number of residents were against the ban.

But supporters say it's a way to fight the growth in the number of children who are overweight or obese (extremely overweight).

"Obviously, toys, in and of themselves, do not make children obese," said county Supervisor Ken Yeager in an Associated Press article. "But it is unfair to parents and children to use toys to capture the tastes of children

when they are young to get them hooked on eating high-sugar, high-fat foods early in life."

Obesity problems

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has found that 25 million American children and adolescents — 32 percent — are obese or overweight.

These kids have a greater chance of developing Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and other dangerous diseases. And because of obesity, today's children may live two to five years less than their parents live, according to a 2005 study.

Obesity is expensive, too. In the U.S., around \$147 billion is spent each year on medical bills related to weight.

Healthy solutions

Soon after Barack Obama became president, First Lady Michelle Obama launched a program to combat childhood obesity.

The Let's Move program grew from a backyard project in which the First Lady and school children planted an organic garden at the White House in Washington, D.C.

"Kids from urban environments, from households [like] mine, who were raised on fried foods and good, tasty stuff, were fully engaged in the process of planting these vegetables, and watching them grow and harvesting them, and cleaning them and cooking them, and eating them, and writing about how vegetables were their friends," she said in an interview with the newspaper USA Today. "So we thought we could be on to something here if we make this conversation a national conversation."

iStock Photo



To get schools to serve healthier foods, the Let's Move program wants to give them \$25 million to replace deep fryers in kitchens with equipment to store more fruits and vegetables.

Talk About the News

- **Supporters of the ban on toys in kids' meals that don't meet nutritional standards believe it's a way to fight childhood obesity. As a class, talk about the new rule in one California county. Do you think kids won't want the burgers, chicken nuggets or fries if a toy isn't included? Discuss the problem of children being overweight or obese and what should be done as a nation.**

Learning Standard: Engaging peers in constructive conversation about matters of public concern by clarifying issues, considering opposing views, applying democratic values, anticipating consequences and working toward making decisions.

Explore Your e-Edition



- **Foods high in calories, fat and salt (sodium) can be a cause of childhood obesity. So can not getting enough exercise. Using today's e-Edition, print photos showing good choices for nutrition and physical activity. Using what you find, create a daily plan for living a more healthy lifestyle. What could you do today to be healthier?**

Learning Standards: Acquiring information from multiple sources; comprehending what constitutes good health and nutrition; writing fluently for multiple purposes.

- **When Michelle Obama planted an organic garden at the White House with elementary school children, she hoped it would start a national conversation about nutrition and healthy lifestyles. Print out a comic strip from today's e-Edition. Using a pencil or liquid eraser, remove the words and replace them with a conversation about health and nutrition. What message do you want the characters to get across?**

Learning Standards: Responding to a variety of texts by making connections to students' personal lives and the lives of others; reading and writing fluently, speaking confidently, listening and interacting appropriately, viewing critically and representing creatively.

- **When the California Restaurant Association disagreed with the ban on toys in kids' meals, the group conducted a poll and bought newspaper ads. Read today's local section of your e-Edition to find an issue you feel strongly for or against. Poll your class about the issue. Create an e-Edition ad to convince others to support your side of the debate.**

Learning Standards: Engaging peers in constructive conversation about topics of interest or importance; acquiring information from multiple sources, organizing and analyzing it; representing creatively.

How Well Did You Read?

Understanding what you read is a skill that will help you all through life. Review the story about toys and fast-food meals by answering the questions below.

1. According to the story, 10 out of 12 kids' meals include:

- A. Toys
- B. Games
- C. Not enough calories for kids
- D. Higher-than-recommended calories for kids

2. The word "obese" means:

- A. Overweight
- B. Underweight
- C. Extremely overweight
- D. Lack of exercise

3. According to the story, overweight and obese children have a greater risk for:

- A. Type 2 diabetes
- B. High blood pressure
- C. High cholesterol
- D. All of the above

4. According to the story, what percentage of American children are overweight or obese:

- A. 25 percent
- B. 32 percent
- C. 47 percent
- D. 147 percent

5. According to the story and photo caption, one thing the Let's Move program would like schools to get rid of is:

- A. Toys
- B. Burgers
- C. Fruits and vegetables
- D. Deep fryers