

# School News & Notes

## Learning To Eat Smart

(NAPSA)—One of the most important tests your student takes isn't given in a classroom. Nutritionists say it's given in the cafeteria—and a growing number of schools are helping kids get ready for it.

Recent studies indicate childhood obesity is reaching epidemic proportions. Diseases—such as type 2 diabetes—that were previously only associated with obese adults now affect thousands of school-aged children.

Today's students are faced with food choices in the cafeteria ranging from candy bars and potato chips to apples and skim milk. Studies show the foods they choose to eat at school can play a major role in their overall health and weight. That's one reason why many of today's schools teach children to think before they eat and show them how to make smarter food choices.

Perhaps surprisingly, one of the most effective teaching tools has been the school vending machine. The machines carry a wide array of snacks, including fresh and dried fruit, granola bars, milk, pretzels and popcorn. Nutritionists say the machines give students the chance to learn to make smart snacking decisions—a healthy habit that can stay with a student for the rest of his or her life.

To help parents, teachers and students learn the importance of choosing a balanced diet, the National Automatic Merchandising Association (NAMA) recently launched the Balanced for Life Campaign. The educational initiative was designed to help slow skyrocketing childhood obesity rates



**Smart Choices—Students can choose from a variety of healthful foods at school.**

by teaching people the importance of nutrition and physical activity.

The campaign includes a variety of tools such as the color-coded Snackwise Nutrition Rating System developed at Columbus Children's Hospital in Ohio. Smart snack choices combined with physical activity are the emphasis of the initiative.

When it comes to staying active, the campaign stresses the fact that kids don't need to hit the treadmill to stay fit. Instead, NAMA suggests parents keep in mind that fun activities such as dancing, playing basketball, or even taking a few laps around the mall can count as exercise.

It's hoped that encouraging children to stay active and giving students a balanced variety of food in vending machines will help them learn about the importance of a balanced diet.

For more information, visit [www.balancedforlife.net](http://www.balancedforlife.net).