

# Citizens' Campaign for Commercial-Free Schools

## Fact Sheet & Guidelines for Grassroots Action

# Risks of Commercializing Education:

## Why We Need Commercial-Free Schools

By: Brita Butler-Wall, Ph.D., Citizens' Campaign for Commercial-Free Schools

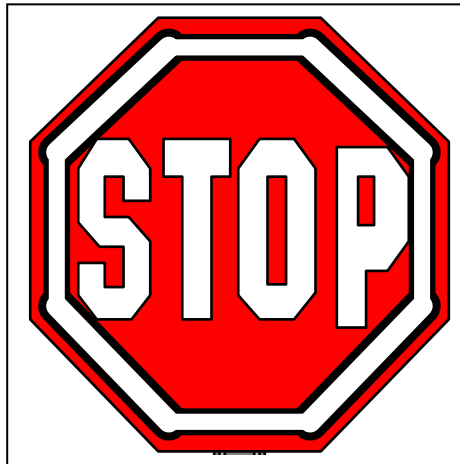
The commercialization of education, carried out by global corporations, is the practice of altering or disrupting the teaching and learning process in schools from kindergarten through college, by introducing advertising and other commercial activities in order to increase profit. Corporations claim, with great fanfare, that they are 'community partners' bringing needed resources to underfunded schools and helping students get the things that legislators can't or won't provide. In reality, through tax loopholes and lobbying, corporations have themselves defunded education. In-School marketers have made it clear that they intend to infiltrate and use public schools as a vehicle for reaching a captive audience. Their stated goal is to brand children as early as possible to consume their clients' products.

Systematic commercialization of schools is a relatively new marketing strategy, although its roots go back decades to in-school 'banking' programs and the occasional fundraiser such as magazine sales. The 1990's saw an explosion of marketing to children in schools. Commercializing schools has the power to break down the distinction between truth and fiction, the relationship between teachers and students, and the barrier between public and private domains. By inserting commercial messages throughout the school day, corporations have violated the social contract that those entrusted with the welfare of children will be guided by their own professional judgment. For the first time in American history, educators are standing aside and allowing global corporations to 'educate' our children.

With little or no state legislation or district policy regulating commercialism, marketers have begun introducing hundreds of commercial messages into the school day. Despite research and testimony from educators, health care professionals, and parents that schools are being misused for commercial purposes and that the teacher-student relationship is being eroded by outside commercial interests, school boards are reluctant to address the issue, much less adopt a strong policy. 'Entrepreneurial' district administrators insist that in-school marketing and corporate 'partnership' schemes are 'creative' sources of education funding.

This new Orwellian era of 'Schools 'R' Us' is frightening. Currently, 40% of all secondary students in the United States are required to watch daily television commercials as part of one marketing scheme – Chris Whittle's 'Channel One' program. Thousands of thirsty students have no choice but to buy Pepsi or Coca-Cola drinks at their school, due to 'exclusive' contracts signed by their school administrators. Thousands of elementary

school students are exposed every day to advertising messages from food companies and industry groups plastered on their cafeteria walls. A 1997 study by the Seattle Council of Parent Teacher Student Associations found a wide variety of commercial messages in 29 of the 30 Seattle elementary and secondary schools sampled.



Children are now bombarded at school with wall advertisements, daily television commercials, promotional samples, school fund-raising schemes, 'contests' requiring students to claim 'prizes' at local franchises, internet banner advertisements on every website seen at school, and large printed advertisements distributed to children to use as 'book covers'. Logos of corporate 'sponsors' festoon everything from lunch menus to homework assignments to bookmarks. Corporate messages are also introduced indirectly through 'sponsored educational materials' such as lesson plans, videos, and 'reproducibles'. Corporations sponsor free 'trainings' for teachers and administrators, and even sponsor

'presentations' at conventions for school board members.

Commercialism of education is inherently damaging for the development of children and ultimately for the future of democracy. The damage to children's development falls into three general categories –physical, psycho-social, and intellectual. A brief look at these three areas shows why education must become commercial-free.

## Physical Development

Schools promote sales of soft drinks containing high levels of sugar and caffeine. Their 'empty calories' can take the place of nutritionally valuable food or lead to weight gain. Schools also expose children to direct advertising and sales of snack foods and candy. Some schools have outsourced their school lunch program to fast-food franchises such as Pizza Hut. School PTAs are paid to encourage families to eat General Mills products, ignoring concerns about possible effects of Genetically Engineered food on children.

The foods and beverages advertised and sold to children at school present added risks for obesity, diabetes, bone fracture, cardiovascular disease, and dental caries. These foods are in direct competition with the school lunch programs and nutritional guidelines set forth by the USDA, as well as the schools' own health curriculums.

## Psycho-Social Development

Advertising is designed to create a sense of insecurity -- which can only be relieved by buying. TV commercials on Channel One, beauty products distributed at all-school assemblies, images on 'free book-cover' ads, and 'self-esteem' videos sponsored by Clearasil give distorted images about identity and interpersonal relationships to both girls and boys. While educators try to foster collaboration, altruism, honesty, and other pro-social values, in-school advertising messages teach greed, gluttony, competitiveness, materialism, sexism, and racial and gender stereotyping. The meta-message of the entire school commercialization process is that integrity can always be sacrificed if the price is high enough. The result of the sell-out is increased adolescent insecurity, cynicism and anomie.

## Intellectual Development

The clutter of advertising throughout the school environment does more than distract children from reflecting on important lessons and focusing on necessary skills. The subtext of all ads is that problems are best solved by spending money. The manipulation of words and imagery to influence behavior is propaganda, so by definition, advertising is antithetical to true education. Given the dearth of systematic media-literacy education, children are ill-equipped to cope with sophisticated marketing techniques. American children are already bombarded with ads in the outside world -- now even school does not provide a refuge for developing critical thinking.



## Democracy

Selling and giving marketers access to the minds of children who need and deserve a real education is not only exploitation of children but of the public trust. A democratic society depends on the good judgment and participation of its citizens, and when the process of educating our own citizens is sabotaged for profit, democracy itself is endangered. Commercialism of schools is not simply a case of 'adding a few ads' to a child's day -- commercializing public education is a wholesale corporate takeover of our future. In a democracy, it's the kind of risky business we can't afford.

## What Can You Do? Guidelines for Local Grassroots Action

### Campaign Goals

Mass grassroots action is the key to stopping this sabotage of the education system and reclaiming schools to benefit children.

**(1) Prohibit all forms of commercial activity in schools.** Adopt strong anti-commercialism policies at state and district levels.

**(2) Abolish existing commercial activities in schools.** Revoke or phase out existing contracts for Channel One, Internet advertising services, exclusive cola contracts, and logo-ridden corporate 'sponsorships'. Remove print and electronic ads and promotional items.

**(3) Provide full and stable funding for public education.** Demand adequate government funding so that educators have the resources they need to provide for the physical, psycho-social, and intellectual development of the children entrusted to them.

### Take Action

**Contact** us and volunteer to help organize a CCCS chapter in your community.

**Circulate** our Commercial-Free Schools petition to identify as many people as possible in your area who oppose the commercialization of education and support commercial-free schools. We will set up local data bases for two-way communications and mobilization.

**Find** subscribers for our free email discussion list and newsletter and donors and supporters for our work.

**Tune in** to our web site <http://www.scn.org/cccs> for news updates and Action Alerts.

**Organize** forums, protests, and news-making events in your local community.

**Pressure** elected public officials, political candidates, and education agencies and demand that all schools become commercial-free zones.

**Support** this campaign by sending a donation to:

## Citizens' Campaign for Commercial-Free Schools

3724 Burke Ave. N. Seattle WA 98103  
Tel. 206-523-4922      EMAIL: [cccs@scn.org](mailto:cccs@scn.org)      WEB PAGE: <http://www.scn.org/cccs>

# What's the best way to teach Washington schoolchildren about health?

- Unsolicited curriculum materials and lesson plans provided to Language Arts teachers by the Chocolate Manufacturers' Association
- Reader boards on school grounds with a Pepsi® logo
- Vending machines filled with Frito-Lay® snack products in the lunchroom
- Coke® machines in the student lounge
- All-school assemblies showing children how to sell See's® candies
- PTA Bake sales of cookies and cupcakes to elementary kids during lunch recess
- Posters promoting McDonalds'® McTeacher night on school walls
- A representative from Godfather's® pizza handing out samples and balloons at school
- Daily TV commercials for M & Ms® and Snickers® shown in class every day
- Music booster clubs selling mugs and candy as fund-raisers
- Students selling Bagels and Fragels during class breaks to raise money to publish the student newspaper
- Reading homework cards for primary-grade children displaying logos for Mission Macaroni®
- PE teachers selling Krispy-Kreme® donuts in lunchroom at lunchtime to raise funds for refurbishing Ping-Pong tables
- Large advertisements for Gatorade®, Fruit Gushers® candy and Pringles® chips distributed to students to use as book covers
- None of the above

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[www.scn.org/cccs](http://www.scn.org/cccs)

Tel. 206.523.4922

Email [btlrwall@drizzle.com](mailto:btlrwall@drizzle.com)

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