

# C.L.A.S.S. BRIEF

Classification of Laws Associated with School Students



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## Strong State Laws Impact Children's BMI, But Laws Generally Weak

**This C.L.A.S.S. brief summarizes a study<sup>1</sup> asking:**

*Are state laws regulating competitive foods in schools associated with lower adolescent weight gain?*

### C.L.A.S.S. Researchers Findings

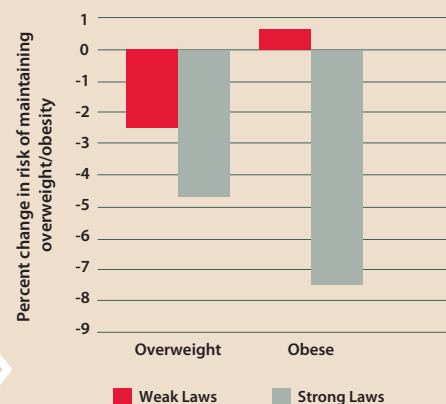
In this nationally representative study of over 6000 public school students in 40 states, adolescents were followed from elementary school (5th grade) in 2004 to middle school (8th grade) in 2007. C.L.A.S.S. researchers found that **strong laws are protective against overweight and obesity**. Specifically:

- *Students living in states with strong laws were less likely to remain overweight or obese from 5th to 8th grade, but the same was not true for students in states with weak laws.*

*over 6,000 public school students  
in 40 States*

- *Consistency in having strong state laws from elementary school to middle school lowers adolescent weight gain.*

Risk of adolescents remaining overweight/obese between the 5th and 8th grade by Strength of 2003 State Competitive Food Laws



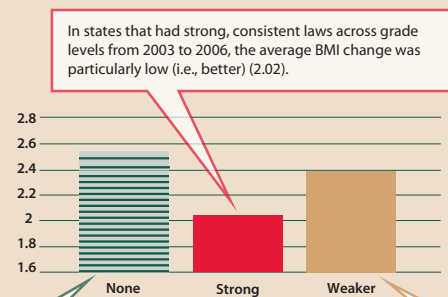
States were classified based on the overall stringency of their competitive food laws

**No law** = State has no law governing competitive foods or beverages

**Weak law** = State law contains nonspecific or not required nutrition standards for competitive foods and beverages

**Strong law** = State laws contain specific, required nutrition standards for competitive foods and beverages

Average change in BMI for adolescents by 2003-2006 competitive food law change<sup>2</sup> BMI Change 2003-2006 laws



In states that had strong, consistent laws across grade levels from 2003 to 2006, the average BMI change was particularly low (i.e., better) (2.02).

If students were exposed to weaker competitive food laws over time, their average BMI change was equal to that of students who were never exposed to competitive food laws in the first place.



## Despite increase in strong laws, many more states still had no or weak laws in 2006

- In 2003, only 6 out of the 40 states had strong competitive food laws for middle schools while 27 states had no competitive food laws.
- In 2006, 15 of the 40 states still had no middle school competitive food laws in 2006, and in 4 states students were exposed to weaker laws in 8th grade than 5th grade, either because the state weakened its laws over time or because the state had weaker laws for middle schools than elementary schools.

Quick Facts		
<b>Adolescent Obesity</b>	Over 1 in 3 adolescents in the U.S. are overweight or obese. <sup>2</sup>	Obesity has many physical, social, and psychological consequences. <sup>3</sup>
<b>School Nutrition Standards</b>	Many schools sell high-fat sweets, salty snacks, sugar-sweetened drinks. <sup>4,5</sup>	These competitive foods may contribute to obesity.
<b>State Law and Nutrition</b>	Some states enacted laws to regulate the nutrition content of competitive foods. <sup>6,7</sup>	Few studies have tested whether state competitive food laws are related to lower weight gain among adolescents.

## What are the next steps?

### For researchers:

- Study the impact of competitive food laws at higher grade levels (i.e., high school).
- Explore racial/ethnic or socioeconomic disparities in the effectiveness of competitive food laws.

### For policymakers:

- Recognize that competitive food standards must be specific and required (i.e., strong) for optimal impact on student health.
- Be aware that laws applicable at the elementary school level likely will not have a positive impact unless complimented by equally strong laws at a higher grade level.

### For the general public:

- Work with local schools and state policymakers to ensure that competitive food nutrition standards are enforced.
- Reinforce the importance of a healthy diet by providing children with fruits, vegetables, whole grains and other nutritious foods at home.

## The Bottom Line

State competitive food laws are associated with lower adolescent weight gain if laws contain strong language with specific standards and are consistent across grade levels.



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Associated with  
School Students**

## About C.L.A.S.S.

Classification of Laws Associated with School Students (C.L.A.S.S.) is a scoring system used to monitor and evaluate state-level school physical education and nutrition policies that have been codified into law. C.L.A.S.S. briefs are 1-2 page summaries of publications and analyses of C.L.A.S.S. – related data and informational materials. For more information, go to <http://class.cancer.gov>.

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