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THE
CENTER
FOR **COMMERCIAL-FREE
PUBLIC EDUCATION**

WINTER 2001

Cola Deals Go Flat

Coke and Pepsi's efforts to take over public school districts are now being thwarted on a regular basis, due in part to the Center's hard work and the growing backlash against exclusive cola deals. Throughout the country, districts have begun to reject cola deals at an unprecedented rate. The last year has witnessed a marked resistance to these deals, evidenced by a new health study, a US Government Accounting Office report, several resolutions passed by dental associations and the rejection of many deals proposed on the local level, including the two largest ever introduced.

Four years ago, Coke and Pepsi began offering financial payments to school districts in exchange for exclusive advertising and beverage sale rights. These deals foster brand-loyalty amongst schoolchildren, who can only drink one brand of soda and see that brand's advertising every school day. Many school districts had decided that the money

was more valuable than keeping advertising out of the schools.

But now the tide is turning. "School districts have begun to weigh the cash against the effects of selling out their students and they're realizing that it's just not worth it," said Dylan Bernstein, Senior Program Director of the Center. "People are waking up to the fact that soda deals won't solve a district's financial problems, they only seek to take advantage of them."

Big Rejections in PA and MI

Within the first half of 2000, the two largest-ever proposed deals were denied: Philadelphia's 10-year, \$43 million Coke contract and a Southwestern Michigan consortium contract which would have involved 110 school districts. Together these two deals would have captured nearly 500,000 students and saturated them with advertising for soda pop.

Those half million students now will enjoy a less commercial education due to the work of involved citizens. Parents Jill Saull and Pat Albright proved powerful enough to ward off Coca-Cola by raising public awareness and communicating with the Board of Education. The local Philadelphia organizers were quoted in the newspaper and featured on TV news. "It proves that the squeaky wheel gets heard," said Saull. "I had never rallied behind a cause before but this one struck a chord with me." Saull's foray into

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Dentists Announce Opposition to Cola Contracts

On October 18th, the American Dental Association (ADA) became the first major professional association to come out publicly against cola marketing contracts in schools. The resolution, approved overwhelmingly by ADA membership, opposes "...contractual arrangements that influence consumption patterns that promote increased access to 'soft drinks' for children." "Since we have yet to see an exclusive cola contract that doesn't push increased cola consumption, this puts the ADA in a firm position of opposition," said Andrew Hagelshaw, Executive Director of the Center for Commercial-Free Public Education. The ADA resolution was inspired by state dental resolutions in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio that were passed earlier this year encouraging dentists in those states to actively oppose soda deals. Dentists in all three of the states contacted the Center for Commercial-Free Public Education for information and asked for various levels of assistance in crafting and promoting their resolutions. ✕

Cola Consumption Leads to Broken Bones

With a recent study showing that active girls who drink colas are five times more likely to fracture bones, the Harvard School of Public Health joins opposition to soda in schools. Grace Wyshak of HSPH says findings show that "drinking any type of carbonated beverage increases the likelihood of having a bone fracture." This study raises important questions about the suitability of soda on school campuses. As Wyshak asks, "...is this a foreshadowing of the skeletal health of a population that has gone through adolescence drinking more soda pop than has any previous generation?" ✕



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Victory! ZapMe Zapped

...by growing backlash against ads in schools

An important victory against commercialism in schools was celebrated in October with the failure of the ZapMe corporation, an internet provider for schools modeled after the infamous Channel One. ZapMe has now abandoned their attempt to become another vehicle for advertisers to enter public school classrooms.

Our readers will recall ZapMe as the company who offered "free" computers to schools willing to contractually agree to have students use them for a minimum of four hours per day. ZapMe, a web browser service that played constant advertising in the lower left hand corner of the screen, was then able to turn around and guarantee their advertisers the same promise of a "captive audience" as Channel One. The company also used the computers to monitor student preferences and collect student demographic information, all of which could be reported back to advertisers. ZapMe's presentation to school boards skipped over all of the less attractive details, including the fact that the computers were very limited in their use, and actually had their disk drives sealed shut to discourage schools from using them for any other purpose.

ZapMe announced in October that they are selling 51% of their company stock to Gilat Satellite Networks Ltd, who intends to use ZapMe's resources to pursue a new business to business marketing strategy, thus taking the company focus away from operating in schools. ZapMe announced they will explore all options for the future of the company, including the possibility of the complete divestiture of their educational network.

ZapMe announced that they will stop installing new computers in schools immediately. It is still unclear what will become of the schools that have already contracted with the company, but as of November ZapMe was sending out letters telling some schools they will have to pay for the service or return the computers. For our readers whose districts have already signed up with ZapMe, now would be the perfect time to raise (or re-raise) your concerns!

"All in all, this is an enormous victory for all community members around the country who oppose advertising in schools," said Andrew Hagelshaw, Executive Director for the Center. "ZapMe collapsed under the weight of their own faulty business plan. They were counting on funding their operations through advertising to a captive audience of students."

ZapMe blamed several factors for their problems, including their inability to sign up enough schools to satisfy investors, and the problems they experienced gaining advertisers. But the thing the Center is most proud of is their mention of the growing climate against advertising in schools. ZapMe has even been specifically informing reporters about the work of the Center for Commercial-Free Public Education. ✕

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involvement with the schools has led her to not only become president of the Home and School Council, she now also sits on a district-wide committee which is evaluating nutrition policies.

"Kids won on all different levels," Albright was pleased to report.

In Southwest Michigan, community members expressed their concerns at a Kalamazoo School Board meeting. "Our schools will be turned into peddlers of sugar water," warned retired teacher and School Watch Team member Robert Hagelshaw. However, the Board didn't heed his advice. Kalamazoo joined the consortium, believing that a less commercial deal could be negotiated. Luckily, the greed of the soda companies made it clear that a deal was not in the schools' best interests. "The bids encouraged increased sales volume and marketing efforts directed at students," the consortium noted in its public statement of rejection. Because the soda companies wouldn't drop the ads, the consortium dropped the deal.

"There is a growing backlash against commercialism in schools," explained the Center's Executive Director Andrew Hagelshaw. "These examples show how people's thinking has changed."

Madison Escapes

The first school district to sign an exclusive deal has become the first to free itself of one. When Madison (WI) signed in 1997, the district didn't realize the enormous amount of advertising mandated by the contract. "<Coke was> smarter than we were," admitted one School Board member. Three members who originally approved the deal voted to let it expire this fall.

Though Coke continued to woo the Board, including taking out a full-page newspaper ad, citizens vocally opposed the contract's renewal. "The people of Madison have said, 'Enough!'. We are sick of corporations lobbying to cut funding for education and then trying to take advantage of our schools with their poorly disguised bribes," said Matt D. Nelson, a local organizer who had warned the Board not to sign in 1997.

Sacramento and Oakland Step Up

When Sacramento (CA) entertained an offer from Pepsi in June, the community was informed that it was a done deal. That deal was quickly undone by Parents and Advocates for Healthy Schools, a local coalition formed to fizzle out the contract. What started as almost unanimous Board approval for the contract turned into unanimous

"The good news..."

A feisty articulate group of troublemakers called UNPLUG is helping communities across the country organize..."

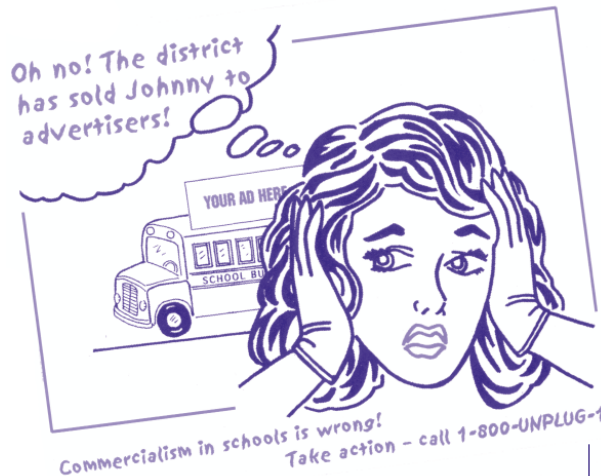
The Nation printed the above quote in November of 1994, when UNPLUG, the organization now called the Center for Commercial-Free Public Education, was still relatively young. Today the Center is an even more powerful force to be reckoned with, but in a new way. Over the years the Center has gained credibility among legislators, school board members, parents, and teachers. Now, with the creation of the Center's Youth Advisory Board, there is work being done to reinvigorate the organization's original radical youth edge.

The Youth Advisory Board, or YAB, is made up of students, high school age and younger, interested in promoting action around the issue of commercialism in schools. Many of the members are active in their communities and schools, advocating for a commercial-free environment. YAB members Lizzie Cohen, Rachel Moreno, Mary Rasmussen, and Leslie DeBartolo created a student group, "Students for Justice," which fought against their district's current Pepsi deal. The YAB currently has several active members, but we are always looking to recruit and spark interest in new youth activists. This is important because the Center will really benefit from the goals of the YAB: to rally students already interested in this issue, to review and make suggestions about the Center's work, to energize new youth activists about commercialism, and to pump the power back to where it belongs - the students.

opposition once the public stepped forward to decry the deal as manipulative, misleading and unwise. After community members repeatedly addressed the Board and put together a press release, the Board began to "see the deeper issues," as parent Rick Feher noted.

Now the Board is in the process of drafting a policy to provide healthier and less commercial vending options. Like Sacramento, Oakland has now not only rejected a contract but is in the process of looking for a way to limit unhealthy beverages and their advertising. Both of these examples show that the impending threat of a cola deal can turn into an opportunity to improve a district's policies and prevent against future commercialization. ✕

Though some schools are still signing these deals, more schools than ever are rejecting them. The Center helped inform and organize every one of the victories mentioned above. To find out how to stop an exclusive contract in your area or to help your district adopt preventative commercialism policies, contact the Center, 1-800-UNPLUG-1.



This sticker, designed by the Youth Advisory Board and School Watch Team member Leslie Grunditz, is available from the Center, along with the exciting new 'zine, "Unplug!"

The majority of YAB members live in the California Bay Area, to fit the original model which was designed to allow YAB students meet face-to-face. By the third meeting, out-of-state member Nell Geiser of Colorado was being incorporated over the phone. Another out-of-state member, Troy Pickard of Oregon, joined her soon after. New members illustrate the expansion of the YAB into a national body, many of whom contributed articles to the YAB 'zine, which helps them share opinions and information with any interested student, in a youth-friendly format.

The newly published 'zine, which is one of the YAB's first projects, represents the issue of corporate messages in schools from a unique student perspective, and gives youth an opportunity to voice their opinions on an issue that increasingly affects more and more of this country's student population. Hopefully, it will be a jumping-off point for other materials that will appeal to students, make the Center's message more accessible to young people, and help youth take ownership of the goals of the organization.

If you are interested in finding out more about the YAB, or would like YAB stickers or copies of the 'zine, email the Center's Senior Program Director at dylan@commercialfree.org or call the Center. ✕

Center Portrait

Meet Our Senior Staff: Senior Program Director Dylan Bernstein and Associate Director Elena White-Negrete stand in front of the Center's community involvement map.



Local Highlights *Actions Against Classroom Advertising*

Burlingame, CA: Mills High School student Rebecca Rosenfelt organized an event to build student awareness about soda and commercialism on her school's "Pepsi Day,"

Tenino, WA: Though the school district signed an exclusive rights deal, vocal parent Milka Hyder didn't give up. She successfully convinced the board to examine Channel One, which they have now unplugged!

Pennridge, PA: Connie Seager, ex-school board member, first fought off a cola contract then helped her district adopt commercialism policies!

Takoma Park, MD: Concerned parent Mike Tabor organized a community meeting to discuss soda deals and commercialism in the area's schools.

Poughkeepsie, NY: The group Organizing for Public Education Now (OPEN) not only killed a soda deal last spring but also held a community meeting featuring Vassar Professor William Hoynes. OPEN continues to inform and activate their local communities.

New York, NY: School board member Irving Hamer is pushing his plan to lease every student a laptop computer – and subsidizing cost by making the district's web-site revenue-generating and commercial. The Center helped activate the NY Coalition for Commercial-Free Schools which has met with some district staff and, through hard work, convinced the Board to adopt some form of commercialism policy and educational plan. But the Board continues to advance the notion of commercializing the district. State Senator Montgomery and Assemblyperson Vann have also become vocally opposed to

this ill-intentioned ads-for-laptops project.

Eugene, OR: The local Alliance for Democracy has forced the district to rescind its soda contract and adopt some kind of commercialism policies before revisiting the deal.

New York, NY: A group of academics, experts and professionals (including the Center) came together to protest the Golden Marbles Awards, a ceremony which congratulates the "best" advertising to children.

Toledo, OH: Bill Garber helped the Ohio Dental Society pass a resolution decrying soda deals and held a press conference in September with Michael Jacobson from the Center for Science in the Public Interest and the Center's own Dylan Bernstein.

Hallsville, TX: Mike Stanfield convinced the district to unplug Channel One!

North Reading, MA: School board member Maureen Vacca helped her board kindly reject Channel One's "invitation" to sign up.

Southfield, MI: Community member Martha Ritchie explained that the district has more to lose than to gain with Coke or Pepsi. The board dropped its inquiry into an exclusive contract.

Washington DC: The Government Accounting Office (GAO) released a report on commercialism in schools, noting that most districts are vulnerable to the growing problem because of their lack of comprehensive policies.

Oakland, CA: The Oakland Arts Magnet school was courted by Zap Me! Teacher Mary Hurley instead found a way to receive a non-commercial technology donation that is far more advantageous to the students.

Hernando County, FL: School Watch

Team member Larry Scott successfully defeated a proposition to rent each student a laptop computer with built-in advertising.

Minneapolis, MN: School Watch Team member Simone French has met with the school board President and helped convince the Board to table the proposed soda contract and first focus on commercialism policies.

Chimacum, WA: Though parents quickly raised enough money to match a promotional offer from Pepsi, the school board declined to accept. Continued pressure has now led to a policy committee which has recommended strong, specific policies for the district.

Seattle, WA: After the school board signed a very controversial Coke deal amidst public outcry, a majority of its members pledged to investigate removing Channel One. Local citizens and the teachers' union are now reminding the members of this duty and the board has agreed to discuss Channel One's removal.

Central Bucks, PA: The district originally voted in a Coke contract, but soon voted to rescind the deal because of local parents' concerns. The local parents group, Parents for Excellence in Education, is now working with the board to adopt policies limiting commercial influence in schools.

Carlsbad, CA: Parent Kelly O'Neil was upset to discover that the district had rescinded its commercialism policy and put a much weaker policy in place. She is working with the Superintendent to strengthen the policy.

Ithaca, NY: Youth Advisory Board member Jenna Hallas has organized with other students to make the school remove hallway advertising. ✕



www.commercialfree.org

email: unplugged@igc.org

fax: (510) 268-1277

(800) 867-5841

(510) 268-1100

1714 Franklin Street, #100-306
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