

Survey Shows California Voters Support State Efforts to Encourage Healthy Eating and Limit Mobile Food Vending Near Schools

May 21, 2013. California Food Policy Advocates sponsored a survey of California voters to understand their views about preventing obesity among children, encouraging healthful eating, and addressing mobile food vending near schools.¹ The survey was in the field from August 17, 2012 to August 23, 2012. The survey finds strong support for efforts to prevent childhood obesity and improve nutrition among children – including support for existing laws that help shape nutrition in California schools. The survey also reveals that a majority supports limiting mobile food vending near schools. Key survey findings include:

- Eight in ten California voters feel it is extremely or very important to take steps to prevent obesity (81%) and improve nutrition (80%) among children.
- Most California voters feel that preventing obesity and improving nutrition for children are issues best dealt with by the entire community, including schools and government (60%), rather than being personal issues best addressed by children and families on their own (39%).
- California voters agree, by a ratio of more than three-to-one, that more needs to be done to limit the availability of unhealthy food around children (77% vs. 22%).
- Large majorities of voters feel that existing laws which set nutritional standards for food sold to children in schools (89%) and existing laws which limit the sale of unhealthy beverages like sodas to students at schools (84%) are good ideas.
- When they consider proposed legislation to limit mobile food vending within 500 feet of schools during certain hours of the day, two-thirds (67%) of California voters support the idea of limits.

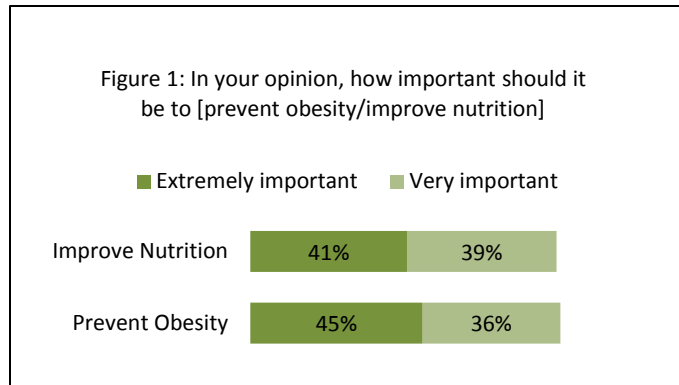
Details about these and other findings can be found on the following pages.

¹ This poll was funded through a grant from the American Heart Association's Childhood Obesity Rapid Response Fund. The survey was conducted online among n=1,053 registered voters using Knowledge Networks' online panel and in accordance with the standards of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). The margin of error for the total results is $\pm 4.4\%$.

FINDINGS

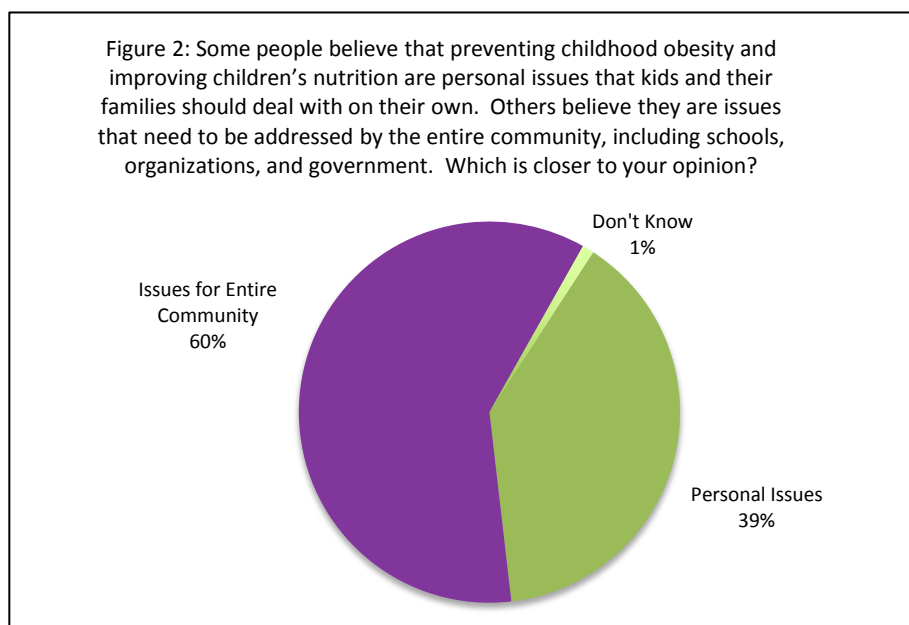
Most California Voters Feel It Is Very Important to Prevent Obesity among Children

About four in ten voters say unhealthy eating is the greatest risk to children’s health in California (39%), followed by a lack of physical activity (22%), drug use (13%), violence (10%), unsafe sexual behaviors (5%), smoking (3%), and alcohol use (2%). Given their concern about unhealthy eating, it is no surprise that more than three-quarters of voters also say that it is extremely or very important to prevent obesity (81%) and improve nutrition (80%) among children in California. (See Figure 1) According to voters, the number one reason to address obesity among children is: We should do something about this because it can have serious consequences for children’s health now and as they get older (64% strongly agree; 26% somewhat agree).



Voters Are More Likely to View Preventing Childhood Obesity as a Community Challenge Rather than Just a Personal Issue

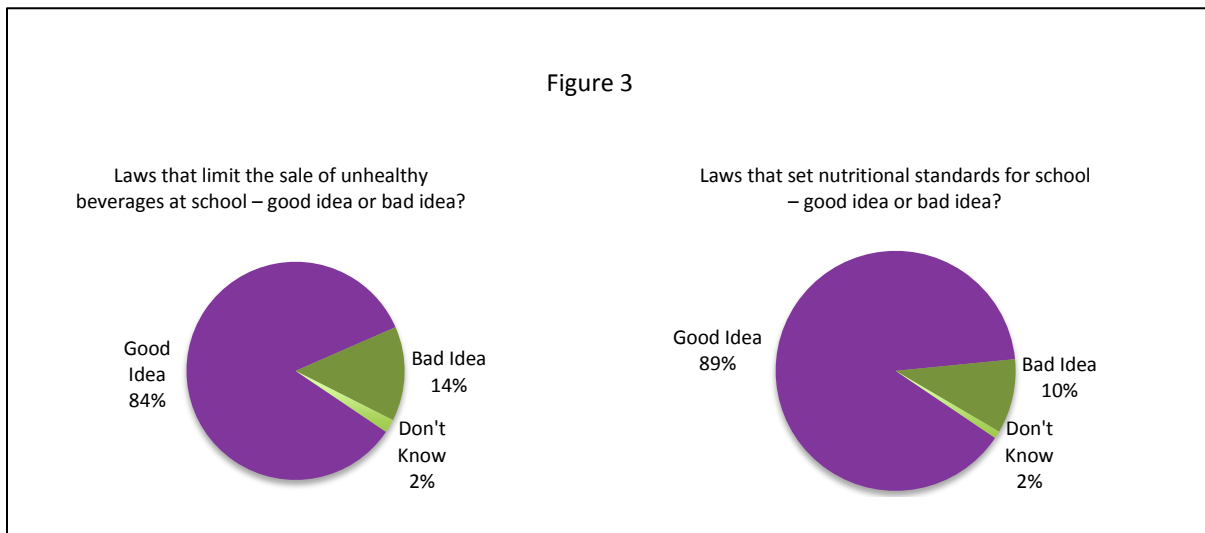
The survey explored whether California voters view childhood obesity and healthy eating for children to be personal issues best addressed by families or to be issues that affect the entire community, and therefore need a community response. As Figure 2 shows, voters are more likely to see childhood obesity and nutrition as community issues.



Because they have a community context for addressing childhood obesity, it makes sense that California voters in the survey agree, by a ratio of more than three-to-one, that they need to do more to limit the availability of unhealthy food around children (77% vs. 22%).

Strong Majorities of California Voters Support State Laws that Promote Better Nutrition in Schools

California voters offer strong support to existing laws that limit the sale of unhealthy beverages like soda to students on public school campuses (52% say these laws are a very good idea and 32% say these laws are a somewhat good idea). California voters also offer strong support to existing laws that set nutritional standards for foods sold to students on public school campuses (57% agree these laws are a very good idea; 32% agree these laws are a somewhat good idea). (Figure 3)



California Voters Have Concerns about Mobile Food Vending Near Schools

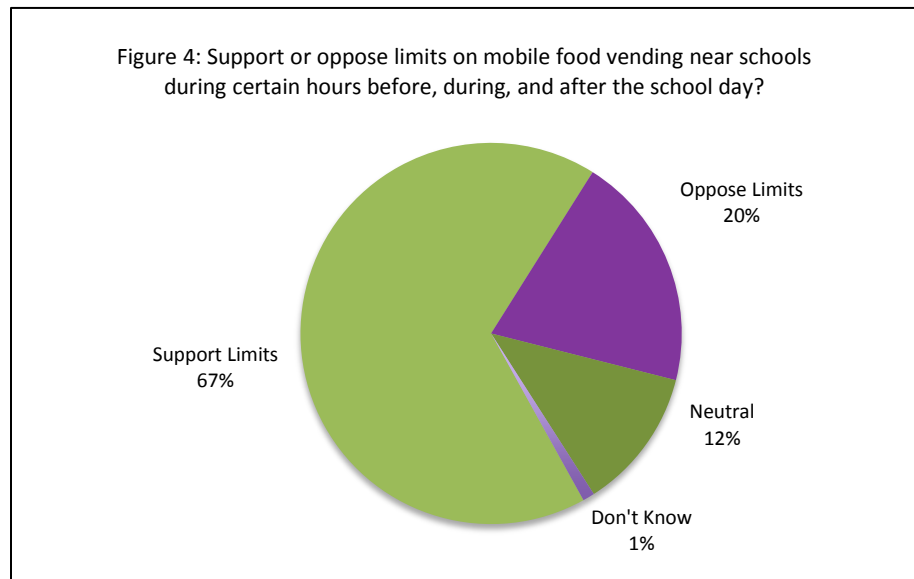
Survey respondents heard the following description of mobile food vending near schools in California: “In many communities across California, mobile food vendors are selling chips, sodas, and similar items to children near schools before, during, and after the school day. Mobile vending near schools can include pushcarts, ice cream trucks, food trucks, and other portable ways of selling food.” In response, about one in five California voters (21%) said they were very familiar with this issue. Most were either only somewhat familiar (34%) or not too or not at all familiar (44%) with this issue.

When asked about various concerns that people might have about mobile food vending near schools, about half of parents say they are extremely or very concerned about kids interacting with unknown adults (49%); kids crossing streets to get to mobile food vendors

(49%); the safety of food items offered through mobile food vending (49%); and mobile food vending providing kids more access to unhealthy foods (48%).

Most California Voters Support Limits on Mobile Food Vending

California voters in the survey were told about a non-profit organization working on nutrition and health issues in California that is asking the state government to limit mobile food vending near public school campuses. Survey respondents heard that this organization is proposing legislation limiting mobile food vending within 500 feet of public school campuses during certain hours before, during, and after the school day. In response, two-thirds of voters (67%) say they support the idea of limits. (Figure 4)



Conclusions

The findings from this survey show that California voters feel that preventing obesity and improving nutrition for children are important efforts. They see these efforts as more than just the responsibility of families – they see a role for the entire community, including schools and government. This feeling is what seems to drive their support for a number of efforts to limit the availability of unhealthy foods around children and schools. California voters offer strong support to laws that limit the sale of unhealthy beverages like sodas at schools and set nutritional standards for foods sold to students at schools.

While mobile food vending near schools seems to be a new issue for many California voters, once they learn about it, many have concerns. Their top worries include: children interacting with unknown adults, children crossing streets to get to mobile food vendors, giving children more access to unhealthy foods, and concerns about food safety. This is why two-thirds of California voters support limits on mobile food vending near schools during certain hours before, during, and after the school day.