



EPSL | Education Policy Studies Laboratory

December 2, 2002

School Board Directors
Salem-Keizer School District
P.O. Box 12024
Salem, OR 97309-0024

Dear Board Members:

The refusal to allow Andrea Boyes to sell her “Titan” brand of bottled water on the West Salem High School campus to benefit the cheerleading squad should set off alarm bells about the wisdom of entering into an exclusive “pouring rights” contract with PepsiCo. The issue of exclusive “pouring rights” bears not only on the health of students at West Salem High, but on the integrity of the learning process and the curriculum as well.

Sugar-sweetened soft drinks contribute a significant amount of calories and sugar to the diets of children. The epidemic of childhood obesity, and the attendant increase in type-2 diabetes among children, is associated with soft drink consumption. It was largely because of such health concerns that the Los Angeles school board in August 2002 banned (starting in 2004) the sale of soft drinks in the district’s 677 schools during school hours. This action will cost Los Angeles schools thousands of dollars; nevertheless, the school board decided that the health of their students was more important than any money they might receive from contracts with bottling companies.

Preventing Andrea Boyes from selling her “brand” of bottled water undermines the attempt to teach Andrea entrepreneurial thinking, marketing, and business management, as the curriculum intends. Instead, she and her fellow students are encouraged to become cynical. The school elders say one thing in the curriculum, but act quite differently in real life.

At a time when high-profile corporations stand accused of unethical behavior and illegal practices, Andrea’s experience with “big business” highlights the hypocrisy of corporate America, not its virtues. It also communicates that the school board and administrators do not take seriously the school’s health and nutrition curriculum. If it were taken seriously, the last thing school board members and administrators would advocate is a policy that promotes the consumption of soft drinks by adolescents.

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I urge you not only to permit the sale of “Titan” bottled water on the West Salem High campus, but also to cancel your exclusive agreement with PepsiCo. Your contract gives away something of much greater value than the dollars it brings in.

Please feel free to visit the Commercialism in Education Research Unit website (<http://schoolcommercialism.org>) for additional information about exclusive bottling agreements and other commercializing activities in schools.

Sincerely,

Alex Molnar
Professor and Director
Education Policy Studies Laboratory