

TO: HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
FROM: JIM THOMAS
SUPERINTENDENT
MCKENZIE SCHOOL DISTRICT
DATE: APRIL 3, 2015
RE: IN SUPPORT OF HB 3363-3

Chair Doherty and Members of the Committee, my name is Jim Thomas. I am Superintendent of the McKenzie School District. I am here today in support of HB 3363 – 3.

I have half a century of experience working with young people in both the public and the private sector, including serving as the superintendent in Scio, Monument, and Reedsport, and before that as a teacher. I have observed a very disturbing trend that has taken place with regard to the health of our youth. Their waistlines have increased and their ambition/attention span has decreased!

Much of this change has to do with the diet that our students are eating both at school and at home. There is a direct correlation between the quality of food students eat and academic outcomes, including graduation rates and student involvement in activities. We have seen it all around us: students who don't eat well just don't test well.

While we do not have control over what students consume at home, we do have a very strong voice in what kids learn about food, while at school. I believe that it should be all healthy, all the time.

We have made gains in the quality of food being served to our students over the last few years, however, for whatever reason, we have been either unable or unwilling to insist that the advertising and the consumption of junk foods in our schools be totally eliminated. The serving of high sugar content junk foods and drinks not only impacts a student's health, but it also can impact classroom behavior. A public school should be the one place that students should be free from a barrage of junk food and junk food marketing.

At the McKenzie School District, we do not have any vending machines. We raise the bulk of our own vegetables and we are in the process of applying for a Farm to School Implementation Grant from the USDA to expand our school garden program to improve the quality of our student meals at home, as well.

In addition to what I know as an educator, I have had an important lesson on the importance of healthy foods, personally. Had I had the education and the support of my school to be conscious about what I was eating, I would not have had to have three stents put in my heart when I was just 65. It took that event for me to change my lifestyle and my diet totally. I have lost just over 50 pounds through diet and exercise since 2008 and am healthier now than I was in my 40's, 50's and 60's.

Our students deserve better, and you are in a position to help make a change, up to and including, saving lives!

ODE should be directed to develop some consistent guidelines to be used statewide to insure a more consistent food marketing program and to ensure a healthier student population.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB 336-3 to keep junk food marketing out of our schools.

Thank you for your attention and for your service.