

## The Right to Water: Improving Water Access in Our Schools

### Quick Facts:

- Kids are not drinking enough water. Studies show kids drink 135% more sugar sweetened beverages than they did in 1977.<sup>1</sup>
- 90% of children across the country drink at least one sugar sweetened drink a day.<sup>2</sup>
- Water is the best drink to quench thirst and stay hydrated. It is calorie and sugar free.<sup>3,4,5</sup>
- Drinking water leads to improved cognitive function, healthy teeth and bodies, and a healthy weight.
- It is the law to provide free water to kids during mealtimes.<sup>6</sup>
- Parents in the Rochester City School District are concerned their children do not have access to drinking water.
- Districts can use National School Lunch Program revenue to purchase necessary items associated with providing drinking water to students.



### Why is water important?

Drinking water is important. Staying hydrated can lead to improved cognitive function, healthy teeth and bodies, and a healthy weight. Water is the best beverage to quench thirst because it is calorie and sugar free. Kids are not drinking enough water. Instead of reaching for water or low-fat milk, they are drinking more soda and sweetened drinks.<sup>7</sup>

Studies show that consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks has grown by 135% in the last 35 years. In fact, over 90% of children across the nation consume at least one sugary beverage every day. Drinking soda and energy drinks contributes to childhood obesity.<sup>8</sup> Children are not reaching for water to stay hydrated.<sup>9</sup>



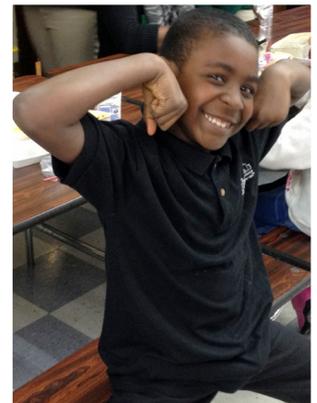
### Why is water access important in schools?

Every child has the right to water. The Surgeon General recommends that improving water access in schools contributes to a healthy weight and improved health.<sup>10</sup> Providing free water to kids during mealtime is the law. Schools are required through the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act to provide water “without restriction in the location where meals are served”.<sup>11</sup>

However, schools face barriers in making drinking water readily accessible during school hours. Students avoid water fountains that are broken, dirty or produce water that tastes bad.<sup>12</sup> When drinking fountains work, they are not located in convenient locations like the school cafeteria.<sup>13</sup>

### Solutions for success

Across the country, some school districts are meeting the water requirements of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act.<sup>14</sup> The creation of water stations in the cafeteria, is an easy way for schools to increase access to drinking water. While portable water is not considered reimbursable under the National School Lunch Program, school districts can charge necessary and reasonable costs associated with providing drinking water.<sup>15</sup> Items like pitchers and paper cups can be charge to a district’s nonprofit food service account. The nonprofit food service account is revenue from selling meals and a la carte items in the cafeteria. Three key opportunities with ranging costs (\$20 to \$5000) are available to districts to improve water access during mealtime<sup>16</sup>: portable water dispensers; point of use water machines; or creating new fountains.



Portable water dispensers (\$15 - \$150)	Point of Use Water Machines (\$250 - \$700)	New Fountains (\$600 - \$1,000)
Refillable containers with a spout for students to self-serve tap water  	Water coolers that hook into a tap water line. Students press a button to dispense water  	Traditional drinking water fountains with or without stations for filling water bottles or stand alone bottle fillers  
Source: Grummon, A., Hampton, K.E., Oliva, A., Brindis, C.D., Patel, A.I. (2014). Water works: A guide to improving access to and consumption of water in schools to improve health and support learning. Online Access.		

## Leading National Examples

It is clear from examples across the nation that water stations lead to kids drinking more water. In **New York City Public Schools** created an intervention that provided water jets in nine schools. Studies observe that after three months, kids were drinking three times more water than before.<sup>17</sup> In **Santa Barbara, California**, the creation of a hydration station in four schools lead to an increase in kids drinking water too. In the first four months after their installation, the hydration stations were used more than 46,000 times.<sup>18</sup> After the first month of installing the first hydration water station at Daniel Breeden Elementary School in **Brownsville, Texas**, the counting device on the station shows that it had dispensed more than 2,000 bottles of filtered water.<sup>19</sup>

## What is happening in Rochester?

Parents in Rochester are worried that kids are not able to have water during school lunch. Parents have observed that kids are only served low-fat milk and have no other option for a drink. If a kid would like to have water with their meal, they have to ask to leave the cafeteria to get a drink from the fountain. In some cases, children are not allowed to leave the cafeteria at all. Water is not easily available to kids during meals.

Together, parents and Healthi Kids want the district to know that every kid has the right to have water during school meals. Together we are advocating for the creation of a water station in each Rochester City School District school cafeteria. Water stations can be as easy as providing water jugs and cups during lunch. They can also be water coolers set up in the cafeteria, or water fountains being renovated to have a bottle filler attached to it. Water stations will allow each school to have free drinking water available to all students.



### Healthi Kids Recommends:

#### 1. The Rochester City School District improve water accessibility during school meals by:

- Creating water stations in each school cafeteria;
- Including water stations into Rochester Schools Modernization Program (RSMP) and the hybrid kitchen remodeling plans;
- Connecting with community funders for mini grant opportunities

#### 2. The PTO/PTA groups create opportunities to improve water access in schools by:

- Initiating a fundraising campaign for establishing water stations in their schools cafeteria;
- Surveying water availability in RCSD elementary schools;
- Encouraging members and parents to talk with their children about how and when they are allowed to drink water during meals;
- Encouraging members to talk to the school principal and share concerns on water access in the school.

#### 3. School principals can improve water access in their school by:

- Encouraging the district to add water stations into their RSMP plans;
- Allowing students to carry reusable water bottles to school meals;
- Working with PTO/PTA groups to understand the barriers to water access in their school.

### Endnotes

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