

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading on the page.
3. Write a one-page reflection in your WN

Santa Clara County Says No to Fast-Food Toys

Source: Justin Berton /The San Francisco Chronicle/April 28, 2010

No toy for you, Junior.

Not if you live in unincorporated Santa Clara County, where the Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to ban restaurants from giving away toys with children's meals that exceed set levels of calories, fat, salt and sugar.

The ordinance, which the board passed by a 3-2 vote, is believed to be the first of its kind in the nation. The target is the fast-food industry and what critics call its practice of marketing unhealthy food to children and fueling an epidemic of obesity among the young. "This ordinance breaks the link between unhealthy food and prizes," said the law's author, Supervisor Ken Yeager. "Obviously, toys in and of themselves do not make children obese. But it is unfair to parents and children to use toys to capture the tastes of children when they are young and get them hooked on eating high-sugar, high-fat foods early in life."

Representatives for the California Restaurant Association, whose members include chains that opposed the ordinance, have 90 days to offer an alternative to the legislation. Violations under the version the board approved Tuesday would be punishable by fines of as much as \$1,000 for each meal sold with a toy.

Yeager said he hopes the law will inspire cities and counties across the country to follow suit like "ripples that create a wave."

The law bans toy giveaways in children's meals that contain more than 485 calories, derive more than 35 percent of their calories from fat or 10 percent from added sweeteners, or have more than 600 mg of sodium. The totals are based on children's health standards set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Of the 151 restaurants in unincorporated Santa Clara County that are covered by the law, a dozen are part of fast-food chains that offer children's meals.

The county was among the first in the nation two years ago to require restaurants to display nutritional values on menus, legislation that has since been adopted by other jurisdictions, said Miguel Marquez, acting county counsel.

Marquez said his office has been contacted by officials from Orange County, Chicago and New York City about Yeager's toys ordinance. In San Francisco on Tuesday, Supervisor Eric Mar asked the city attorney to draft legislation similar to Santa Clara County's law. "Just as with menu labeling, this is clearly within our authority," Marquez said. "We're on firm legal ground here."

Marquez said enforcement will be the job of county public health inspectors.

Members of the California Restaurant Association were unsure if they will offer an alternative to the ordinance, said Amalia Chamorro, the association's director of governmental affairs. "If the point is to get a dialogue going with the industry about health, that dialogue is already ongoing," Chamorro said. "If the point is to solve childhood obesity, taking away a toy isn't going to help."

Chamorro said her members will "obey the laws of the land," but she said she feared the new ordinance could unintentionally punish all child-friendly restaurants. "Where does it stop? Restaurants that offer crayons and coloring books?"

At least one parent, interviewed at a Burger King on Race Street and West San Carlos in an unincorporated area near San Jose, agreed with the restaurant group that the law amounted to government overreaching.

"I don't need politicians to tell me what I can and can't buy for my kid," said Chris Mackey, who bought his daughter, Cattie, a Kids Meal that included an "Iron Man 2" action figure. "We don't come in here every day, and I don't associate giving my daughter a toy with giving her bad food. This is a private matter between me and my child."

But Chris Markato of San Jose, 18, who said he sometimes buys children's meals for the smaller portions and value, said the law sounded like a good idea. "It's kind of sad when you see really big kids," he said. "They probably shouldn't eat so much sugar."

The supervisors suggested that Chamorro's restaurant group come back to the county with a plan that promotes more healthful food choices to keep the toys.

Supervisor Don Gage, who voted against the ordinance, said he would rather see county funding go toward teaching parents how to buy and prepare more healthful foods. "If we're going to attack the problem, we need to do it with education of parents, not by taking a toy away from the kids," Gage said. "I agree obesity is a major problem, but it's not a 3-year-old who's buying the meals."

A new Santa Clara County law bans restaurants from giving away toys with children's meals under these conditions:

- Calories: A meal has more than 485 calories, a single food item has more than 200 calories, or a drink has more than 120 calories.
- Salt: The meal has more than 600 mg of sodium, or a single food item more than 480 mg.
- Fat: More than 35 percent of a meal's calories comes from fat.
- Sugar: More than 10 percent of a meal's calories comes from added sweeteners.

What is the author's purpose in writing this piece?

Who is the intended audience?

Possible WN topics:

- Do you support this proposed law? Why? Why not?
- Will this law work? Predict.
- Are local governments responsible for our eating habits?
- How do you think this law will affect fast food restaurants in your community?