

Snack attack: 'We're trying to get them to learn good eating habits'



Paul Jorgensen loads a vending machine with granola bars at Hazel McCallion Senior Public School in Mississauga yesterday. Chips are kept in the machine's top rows.

Goodbye Mr. Chips, Kennedy says

Plans junk food ban in a few weeks Elementary school students affected

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Ontario will ban junk food in elementary schools within a few weeks, Education Minister Gerard Kennedy said yesterday.

The warning came as Kennedy said "dozens" of school boards have not complied with his voluntary goal of having chocolate bars, chips and similar snacks out of vending machines by the start of this school year.

"Voluntary is taking too much time," Kennedy said on his way into a cabinet meeting at Queen's Park. "Every single trustee group and every school board is on side with the idea of the ban, it's just taking too much time to have them implement it."

The ministry is consulting nutritionists to prepare dietary guidelines on what is appropriate for sale in schools.

"We're going to back that up with regulation if necessary to

make sure that they're followed," Kennedy said. "It won't be chocolate bars and those things that are very low nutritional value."

For vending machine companies doing business in schools, determining what alternative snacks are considered healthy enough has been "the million dollar question," said Paul Jorgensen, owner of P.J.'s Coffee Vending and Services Ltd. in Mississauga.

He's spent several thousand dollars consulting a nutritionist on a new line-up of snacks to put in two Peel Region schools he now services among a larger roster of corporate clients.

"It's a considerable investment," said Jorgensen. "This is a business where people make back their money on nickels and dimes. It doesn't make sense for just two schools but I'm trying to attract more."

One of his moves has been to



Education Minister Gerard Kennedy said too many schools are still selling junk food.

put healthier snacks, such as granola bars, in the bottom of a vending machine at Hazel McCallion Senior Public School in Peel Region, with chips more out of sight in the top rows.

"We've had some pretty good co-operation from the people who own vending machines and

from people who sell some of the product that is considered junk food," Kennedy said. "They're voluntarily wishing to participate."

The president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, representing 32 public school boards, acknowledged school boards are at "different levels of compliance" with Kennedy's junk food directive.

"Some schools might have (vending machine) contracts they're waiting to run out," said Rick Johnson.

He's also concerned about what he sees in the lunch bags of some children in the schools of the Trillium Lakelands District School Board in cottage country, of which he is a trustee.

"We're working on information for kids and parents on what healthy things to put in lunch boxes."

Kennedy said some schools are keeping junk vending machines as a source of revenue, a habit he wants them to kick given his government's extra \$1.1 billion investment in education.

"It's fair for us to ask that this small part of revenue be eliminated because of its contradictory effects on kids," Kennedy said.

"We're trying to get them to learn good eating habits when they're still young and impressionable."

Several boards have approved healthy eating and nutritional policies for their schools.

These include the Trillium Lakeland District Schools Board, the Niagara Catholic District School Board, the Greater Essex County District School Board near Windsor, and the Thames Valley District School Board in the London area, according to education ministry officials.

"We have been moving toward getting rid of junk food," said Sheila Ward, director of the huge Toronto District School Board.

"I don't think there's any chips or chocolate bars in any of our elementary schools. If they're there, they are there only with the permission of the parents."