



1600 20th Street, NW • Washington, D.C. 20009 • 202/588-1000 • [www.citizen.org](http://www.citizen.org)

May 9, 2018

Dear Wentzville School District Board Members,

Commercial Alert is a project of Public Citizen, a consumer protection organization based in Washington, D.C., with more than 400,000 members and supporters. We aim to keep commercial culture within its proper sphere, and to prevent it from exploiting children and subverting higher values of family, community, environmental integrity, and democracy.

We understand that the Wentzville School District has recently expanded its advertising program to recruit businesses for advertising at sports and extracurricular events, on school owned websites, and through sponsorship opportunities. We write to urge the board to reconsider any plans to allow commercial advertising on any school property, including websites and apps. We understand that the financial pressures that your school district faces to fund student activities make you eager to identify non-traditional sources of funding. However, subjecting children to even greater amounts of advertising is the wrong response. It will raise little revenue while undermining Wentzville School District's educational and child development mission. Educational institutions should promote civic virtue and the public good, not commercial values.

As you know, childhood and adolescence are crucial periods for young pupils to develop their identities. Corporations exploit children's developmental challenges and convey through sophisticated marketing strategies that children should build their identities and judge their peers based on what they have, rather than on who they are. In the process, children end up with a damaged sense of self, superficial worldview, and a diminished sense of social responsibility. There is no need to overstate the case; certainly, many children navigate the world of hyper-marketing successfully. But it is nonetheless a negative influence – one that schools, of all places, should not be promoting. Children are already surrounded by near-constant advertising that promotes consumerism and commercial values. But the ubiquity of advertising is not a reason for allowing advertising on school grounds to persist – it is a reason why children need a sanctuary from a world where everything seems to be for sale.

Corporate advertisers advance values inconsonant with those schools stand for. Education should empower students to think critically and independently. Students should be



1600 20th Street, NW • Washington, D.C. 20009 • 202/588-1000 • [www.citizen.org](http://www.citizen.org)

encouraged to form their own beliefs, to question established ideas, and to develop intellectual curiosity. Marketing and advertising contravene these goals. Commercialism teaches students that everything has a price. In-school advertising and marketing schemes convey market rather than civic values and impede the ability of schools to function as open spaces where ideas are freely exchanged and the next generation of public-minded, conscientious, and virtuous students can grow.

Weighted against the real harms of school commercialism, the financial benefits of such a scheme are minuscule. As we have seen with other schools, school advertising programs rarely bring in significant funds, and the small revenues often barely offset the administrative cost and burden of putting them in place.<sup>i ii</sup>

We urge you not to allow companies to advertise to students through sponsorships or any other form of recognition on school property or websites operated by Wentzville School District. We look forward to your response and would be pleased to discuss these matters with you further. Please direct any response to Kristen Strader at [kstrader@citizen.org](mailto:kstrader@citizen.org) or 202-588-7785.

Sincerely,

Robert Weissman  
President, Public Citizen

Kristen Strader  
Campaign Coordinator, Public Citizen's Commercial Alert

Cc: Derrick Docket, Director of Marketing Wentzville School District

---

<sup>i</sup> Ben-Ishai, Elizabeth (2012). School Commercialism: High Costs, Low Revenues." Public Citizen. Retrieved from [http://archive.commercialalert.org/PDFs/SchoolCommercialismReport\\_PC.pdf](http://archive.commercialalert.org/PDFs/SchoolCommercialismReport_PC.pdf).

<sup>ii</sup> Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. School Bus Advertising Revenue. Retrieved from <http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/sites/default/files/schoolbusadvertisingchart.pdf>.