



Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood



July 29, 2014

Mr. Don Thompson
President and Chief Executive Officer
McDonald's Corporation
2111 McDonald's Dr.
Oak Brook, IL, 60523

Dear Mr. Thompson,

As advocates for children and public health, we were extremely interested in your remarks at the 2014 Annual Shareholders Meeting. In response to a question about how McDonald's markets to children, you said, "we don't put Ronald out in schools" and "in schools and our restaurants you never see Ronald McDonald."¹ You listed exceptions to the policy in restaurants, but not in schools.

We were so pleased that you rightly recognized that schools should be off-limits to commercial advertising and branding. Over the past several years, Ronald McDonald has been a regular visitor to preschools and elementary schools in the United States, Brazil, and countries around the world. These visits, which were supposedly designed to inspire physical activity, literacy, and pro-social skills, promoted McDonald's to a captive audience of schoolchildren through exposure to, and interaction with, the brand's most powerful icon.

Based on your remarks, we believed that McDonald's new policy was to no longer send Ronald McDonald into schools. Now, however, we are confused.

On July 11, 2014 Heidi Barker Sa Shekhem, your Vice President of Corporate Relations, sent an email to Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood in response to a draft of a letter intended for you that was circulating internationally among organizations that care about children. Ms. Barker Sa Shekhem stated we "incorrectly" deduced that "comments made by our CEO Don Thompson at our Annual Meeting reflect a new 'policy' regarding Ronald McDonald."

Ms. Barker Sa Shekhem went on to say:

To be clear, there is no new policy regarding Ronald McDonald. Mr. Thompson was correct in stating that "we don't put Ronald out in schools." Obviously, only schools or affiliated groups manage their invited guests. When invited to schools by administrations, or affiliated organizations such as parent-teacher groups,

¹ Audio recording of 2014 McDonald's Annual Shareholder Meeting available at <https://mcdonalds.webcasts.com/viewer/event.jsp?ei=1035732>. Relevant remarks begin at 46:47

Ronald McDonald presents programs about bike safety, literacy or other children's well-being matters.

This would appear to contradict your strong assertion that “you never see Ronald McDonald” in schools. If Ronald McDonald does still appear in schools, why are you telling stockholders that he doesn't? If your assertion is accurate, then is there perhaps a new policy of which Ms. Barker Sa Shekhem is unaware?

If that's the case—and in the best interest of children, we hope that it is—please answer the following questions about how this new policy is being implemented:

1. Will you publicly post your new policy regarding Ronald McDonald's in-school visits, that is, that Ronald McDonald does not go to schools? Will you update your pledge with the Council of Better Business Bureaus Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative² to reflect this new policy?
2. Ronald McDonald visits to elementary and preschools have occurred not only in the United States,³ but in other countries including Brazil,⁴ China,⁵ Australia,⁶ and The Netherlands.⁷ Does your new policy prohibiting Ronald McDonald visits to schools apply worldwide?
3. In response to criticisms of other McDonald's in-school marketing programs, spokespeople for your company have said the programs were “local decisions.”⁸ How was McDonald's new policy communicated to local franchises and regional marketing associations? Are you aware that several local and regional McDonald's websites are still promoting Ronald McDonald's availability for school visits?⁹
4. If parents or educators are aware of Ronald McDonald school visits, to whom should they report the violation of McDonald's policy?

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<http://www.bbb.org/us/storage/16/documents/cfbai/McDonalds%20Final%20Pledge%20January%202013.pdf>

³ See Appendix A: Ronald McDonald School Visits – United States.

⁴ (2013, September). Alana denuncia ação do mcdonald's em escolas para os ministérios da justiça e da educação e para secretarias de educação. *alana*. Accessed July 25, 2014 from <http://defesa.alana.org.br/post/62812363307/alana-denuncia-acao-do-mcdonalds-em-escolas-para-os>.

⁵ Dyer, G. (2006, November 25). Ronald helps McDonald's head off China backlash. *Financial Times*. Accessed July 25, 2014 from <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/56b66b0a-7c29-11db-b1c6-0000779e2340.html#axzz38DaEO222>.

⁶ (2013, September 10). School supports special event. *The Western Star* (Roma, Queensland). Accessed July 25, 2014 from LexisNexis Academic.

⁷ Zech, M. (2014, June 25). STOP FOOD ADVERTISING IN SCHOOLS. *Foodwatch*. Accessed July 25, 2014 from <http://www.nltimes.nl/2014/06/25/stop-food-advertising-schools-foodwatch/>.

⁸ Elliot, S. (2007, December 6). Straight A's, With a Burger as a Prize. *The New York Times*. Accessed June 30, 2014 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/06/business/media/06adco.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁹ See Appendix B: McDonald Websites that Advertise Ronald McDonald School Visits in the United States.

If you are accurate that Ronald McDonald is never seen in schools, we would applaud McDonald's decision to end the exploitative practice of using him to market to children in schools. If not, we urge you to change McDonald's policies to be in line with your characterization of them.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, United States
Instituto Alana, Brazil
Berkeley Media Studies Group, United States
California Center for Public Health Advocacy, United States
California Project LEAN, United States
CEASE, United States
Center for a New American Dream, United States
Center for Science in the Public Interest, United States
Childhood without Advertising (Stowarzyszenie Dziecko bez Reklamy), Poland
Children's Food Campaign, Sustain, United Kingdom
Consumers International, Office for Latin American and the Caribbean, Chile
Corporate Accountability International, United States
Defending the Early Years, United States
Dietitians For Professional Integrity, United States
Earth Day Network, United States
Eat Drink Politics, United States
Educators for Social Responsibility, United States
El Poder del Consumidor, Mexico
Food & Water Watch, United States
Food Democracy Now!, United States
foodwatch International, Europe
Heart of Mersey, United Kingdom
Idec - Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor, Brazil
Intervozes - Coletivo Brasil de Comunicação Social, Brazil
Kidz Inc., United Arab Emirates
Nancy Huehnergath Consulting, United States
National Union of Teachers, United Kingdom
Obligation, Inc., United States
Observatório de Políticas de Segurança Alimentar e Nutrição - OPSAN/ UnB, Brazil
Organic Consumers Association, United States
PEACHSF, United States
Proteste - Associação de Consumidores, Brazil
Psychologists for Social Responsibility, United States
Public Citizen, United States
Public Health Institute, United States
Real Food Media Project, United States
Rethinking Schools, United States

Save Childhood Movement, United Kingdom
Small Planet Institute, United States
SuperKids Nutrition, United States
Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (TRUCE), United States
Teaching for Change, United States
The Lunch Tray, United States
UK Health Forum, United Kingdom
US Healthy Kid, United States
Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America, United States
Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, United States

Appendix A: Ronald McDonald School Visits – United States

All links accessed on July 25, 2014.

School	City	State	Link
Perdew Elementary School	Rancho Cucamonga	California	Link
Saint Stephen School	Hamden	Connecticut	Link
Cypress Creek Elementary	Port Orange	Florida	Link
Delaware Elementary	Des Moines	Iowa	Link
Paul Revere Primary School	Blue Island	Illinois	Link
Carl Sandburg Elementary School	Joliet	Illinois	Link
Rosa Parks Elementary	Lexington	Kentucky	Link
Estill Springs Elementary	Irvine	Kentucky	Link
Providence Elementary	Winchester	Kentucky	Link
Strode Station Elementary	Winchester	Kentucky	Link
Clay City Elementary	Clay City	Kentucky	Link
Central Elementary	Barbourville	Kentucky	Link
Girdler Elementary	Barbourville	Kentucky	Link
Rowan County Christian Academy	Morehead	Kentucky	Link
Central Elementary	Barbourville	Kentucky	Link
Southern Elementary	Falmouth	Kentucky	Link
Highland Elementary School	Westfield	Massachusetts	Link
Reese Elementary School	Reese	Michigan	Link
University Avenue Elementary	Blaine	Minnesota	Link
Lyndale School	Minneapolis	Minnesota	Link
St. Peter, Paul, and Michael	St. Cloud	Minnesota	Link
Walnut Grove School	Walnut Grove	Minnesota	Link
Lino Lakes Elementary	Lino Lakes	Minnesota	Link
J.W. Smith	Bemidji	Minnesota	Link
Wilshire Park Elementary	St. Anthony	Minnesota	Link
Lake Ripley Elementary	Litchfield	Minnesota	Link
Middleton Elementary	Woodbury	Minnesota	Link
Albertville Primary School	Albertville	Minnesota	Link
Pinewood Elementary	Monticello	Minnesota	Link
Shirley Hills Elementary	Mound	Minnesota	Link
Northside Elementary	St. James	Minnesota	Link
Global Academy	Columbia Heights	Minnesota	Link
Royalton Elementary	Royalton	Minnesota	Link
Immanuel Lutheran School	Lakefield	Minnesota	Link
Eden Valley Watkins Elementary	Eden Valley	Minnesota	Link
Moreland Arts and Health Sciences Magnet	West St. Paul	Minnesota	Link
Zumbrota-Mazeppa Elementary	Zumbrota	Minnesota	Link
Liberty Ridge Elementary	Woodbury	Minnesota	Link

Zimmerman Elementary	Zimmerman	Minnesota	Link
Adams Elementary	Coon Rapids	Minnesota	Link
Lakeside Elementary	Chisago City	Minnesota	Link
Valley View Elementary	Bloomington	Minnesota	Link
Weaver Elementary	Maplewood	Minnesota	Link
Nisswa Elementary	Nisswa	Minnesota	Link
Meadowview Elementary	Farmington	Minnesota	Link
Bethune Elementary	Minneapolis	Minnesota	Link
Appleton Elementary	Appleton	Minnesota	Link
Cokato Elementary	Cokato	Minnesota	Link
Wyoming Elementary	Wyoming	Minnesota	Link
St. Charles Elementary	St. Anthony	Minnesota	Link
Discovery Elementary	St. Cloud	Minnesota	Link
Forest Lake Elementary	Forest Lake	Minnesota	Link
Scandia Elementary	Scandia	Minnesota	Link
Early Childhood Center	Chaska	Minnesota	Link
Franklin Elementary	Mankato	Minnesota	Link
Sibley Elementary	Northfield	Minnesota	Link
Westwood Elementary	Bloomington	Minnesota	Link
Braham Elementary	Braham	Minnesota	Link
Vista View Elementary	Burnsville	Minnesota	Link
Kennedy Elementary	Willmar	Minnesota	Link
Mountain Lake Elementary	Mountain Lake	Minnesota	Link
Fair Oaks Elementary	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	Link
William Budd Elementary	Fairmont	Minnesota	Link
Our Lady of Peace	Minneapolis	Minnesota	Link
Oakview Elementary	Maple Grove	Minnesota	Link
Sacred Heart School	Sauk Rapids	Minnesota	Link
Horace May Elementary	Bemidji	Minnesota	Link
Kimball Elementary	Kimball	Minnesota	Link
Washburn Elementary	Bloomington	Minnesota	Link
Westwood Elementary	Waite Park	Minnesota	Link
Pleasantview Elementary	Sauk Rapids	Minnesota	Link
Cooper Elementary	Minneapolis	Minnesota	Link
Sibley Elementary	Northfield	Minnesota	Link
Ceder Mountain Elementary	Franklin	Minnesota	Link
Isanti Elementary	Isanti	Minnesota	Link
Bridge View Elementary	St. Paul	Minnesota	Link
Northern Elementary	Bemidji	Minnesota	Link
Solway Elementary	Bemidji	Minnesota	Link
ECC	Chaska	Minnesota	Link
Reede Gray School	Redwood Falls	Minnesota	Link
University Avenue School	Blaine	Minnesota	Link
Fairview Elementary	Mora	Minnesota	Link
New Ulm Catholic Schools	New Ulm	Minnesota	Link

Nokimis Montessori	Minneapolis	Minnesota	Link
Lakeview Elementary	New Hope	Minnesota	Link
St. Philip's School	Bemidji	Minnesota	Link
Lear North Elementary School	North Ridgeville	Ohio	Link
Yoshikai Elementary School	Salem	Oregon	Link
Scott Elementary School	Salem	Oregon	Link
Terrace Elementary School	Allentown	Pennsylvania	Link
Mahanoy Area Elementary	Mahanoy City	Pennsylvania	Link
Marshall Elementary School	Vancouver	Washington	Link
Long Beach Elementary School	Long Beach	Washington	Link
La Center Elementary School	La Center	Washington	Link
Oak Heights Elementary School	Vancouver	Washington	Link
Lincoln Elementary School	Vancouver	Washington	Link
Central Valley Kindergarten	Spokane Valley	Washington	Link
New Richmond Elementary	New Richmond	Wisconsin	Link
St. Mary's School	New Richmond	Wisconsin	Link
Greenfield Elementary School	Baldwin	Wisconsin	Link

Appendix B: McDonald Websites that Advertise Ronald McDonald School Visits in the United States

All links accessed on July 25, 2014.

- Arkansas - <http://www.mcarkansas.com/35917/54311/Invite-Ronald-To-Your-School/>
- Central Kentucky - <http://wheresronald.com/school-shows.html>
- Delaware - <http://www.mcdelaware.com/10394/44028/Invite-Ronald-To-Your-School/>
- Georgia - <http://www.mcgeorgia.com/11065/43228/Invite-Ronald-To-Your-School/>
- Houston, Texas - <http://www.mcdonaldshouston.com/shows.htm>
- Indiana - http://www.bigredshoecentralindiana.com/school_shows.html
- Michigan - <http://www.mcmichigan.com/10605/25738/default-page/>
- Minnesota/Wisconsin - <http://www.mcmnnesota.com/5914/45282/Invite-Ronald-To-Your-School/>
- North Carolina - <http://www.mcnorthcarolina.com/26112/21287/Ronald-McDonald-Program/>
- New Jersey - <http://www.mcnewjersey.com/3977/44028/Invite-Ronald-To-Your-School/>
- North Dakota - <http://www.mcnorthdakota.com/5320/94/Ronald-McDonald/>
- Ohio - <http://www.mcohio.com/5845/2929/School-Programs/>
- Oregon - <http://www.mcoregon.com/6284/2088/Ronald-McDonald-School-Shows/>
- Oregon/Southwest Washington - <http://www.mcschoolshows.com/>
- Pennsylvania - <http://www.mcpennsylvania.com/27162/1255/Ronald-McDonald-School-Shows/>
- San Diego, California - <http://www.sdmcdonalds.com/ronald-mcdonald.aspx>
- South Carolina - <http://www.mcsouthcarolina.com/18467/43228/Invite-Ronald-To-Your-School/>
- Southeastern Wisconsin - <http://www.ronaldmcdonaldofsewi.com/>
- Southern California - <http://www.mcdonaldssocal.com/ronald-visits?nav=educators>