



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."<sup>1</sup> 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,

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<sup>1</sup> 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 Initiative<sup>2</sup> to reflect this new policy?
2. Ronald McDonald visits to elementary and preschools have occurred not only in the United States,<sup>3</sup> but in other countries including Brazil,<sup>4</sup> China,<sup>5</sup> Australia,<sup>6</sup> and The Netherlands.<sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup> 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?<sup>9</sup>
4. If parents or educators are aware of Ronald McDonald school visits, to whom should they report the violation of McDonald's policy?

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

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.bbb.org/us/storage/16/documents/cfbai/McDonalds%20Final%20Pledge%20January%202013.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A: Ronald McDonald School Visits – United States.

<sup>4</sup> (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>.

<sup>5</sup> 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>.

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

<sup>7</sup> 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/>.

<sup>8</sup> 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>.

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

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  
Campaign for Commercial-Free Education, Ireland  
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 America 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 Huehnergarth 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 Kids, 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.*

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

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

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

## 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](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>