

Student Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee 2009-10 year end report

On behalf of the Student Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee (SNPAC), I want to share with you some of the many positive things that have happened this year in the area of school food, some of which represent the culmination of years of effort, and all of which move the SFUSD closer to our goals. Student Nutrition Services (SNS) has done an amazing job this year!

In 2004, SNPAC became aware that SFUSD was one of the very few school districts operating cafeterias without a Point of Sale (POS) system. The POS uses electronic technology to check students' eligibility for free meals, to enable swipe card payment for those who must pay for their meals, and to track sales and inventory. The manual system SFUSD used allowed errors of the type that caused SFUSD to flunk the state program review in 2008-09; as well, it made it easy for an onlooker to see which students were being given free meals and which were paying cash. While not considered to be "overt identification" of low income students, this kind of system nonetheless leads to a stigma for poorer students, who, by middle school, sometimes feel such shame at being identified as poor that they begin skipping lunch rather than bear the stigma of poverty. After many years of fruitless searching by SNPAC for funding for a POS system, new Superintendent Carlos Garcia promised in 2007 that he would find the money to fund a POS; in June 2008, voters approved Prop A which contained a portion of fund for technology, and the POS project was greenlighted. Installation was to have begun last fall with a timeline of two years to get all SFUSD schools up and running, but due to the incredible effort put out by the district's IT department and SNS, it is thrilling to report that by the end of the current school year, all SFUSD schools will have been wired for the POS, and the system will be operating district wide when school reopens in the fall. Given that virtually every school needed to be completely rewired to accommodate the POS, the installation timeline, which in spring was completing 6 schools per week, is truly an outstanding accomplishment.

In conjunction with the POS installation, SNS has begun using the Meal Pay Plus system, which allows parents of paying students to add money to their child's meal account online. In addition to this added convenience for parents, who no longer have to scramble for lunch money each day, the system can completely eliminate the handling of cash at school sites, saving all cash-related expenses (such as courier fees to collect cash from sites, and excess deposit fees from the bank.) Meal Pay Plus also enables SNS to track cash shortages by school and by family.

Additional focus on the importance of getting every family to fill out a meal application, including extra efforts from the LEADS, resulted in a large increase in returned applications and, as expected, a significant jump in free lunch eligibility district wide, from just over 54% in 2008-09 to about 58% in 2009-10. By the end of February, 44 school sites had received completed applications from at least 95% of their students; that group included 3 middle schools (Roosevelt, Presidio, and Francisco) and Newcomer HS. As a result of better meal app collection, some high schools, such as Lincoln, showed numbers of students qualified for free lunch over 50% for the first time in years. Even

Clarendon Elementary, which has long been viewed as the most affluent school in the district, with just 11.6% of its students qualified in 2008-09, jumped to 15.6% this year - an increase of almost 35% in just one year - with 98.6% of families turning in the meal application. This goes to prove what SNS and SNPAC have long maintained, that when all families routinely fill out the form, more families will qualify for free meals, and that there are pockets of previously undetected poverty even at the most seemingly affluent schools.

More great news is the rollout of the Super Choice menu at 3 pilot middle and high school sites. Designed to help eliminate the stigma poor students feel which keeps them from accessing the free meals to which they are entitled, Super Choice replaces the a la carte sales previously located in cafeteria Beaneries. All Super Choice offerings are full meals, not snacks; all are proven student favorites such as sandwiches and rice bowls, accompanied by fresh vegetables and fruit; and all are available to any student, regardless of whether they qualify for free lunch or pay for their meals. The Super Choice menu has nearly doubled the number of students choosing a school lunch at the pilot sites (Francisco MS, Balboa and Lowell HS), and students are enthusiastic about the new menu offerings like the pesto, tomato, and mozzarella sandwich. Super Choice will be rolled out to every middle and high school in the fall. Using their swipe card or PIN number with the POS, any middle or high school student will be able next year to get a meal from any lunch line, and no one except the cafeteria worker will ever know whether the student gets free meals or not.

More good news - Grab n Go breakfast has expanded to seven high schools (Balboa, Galileo, Mission, O'Connell, Wallenberg, Lowell, and Burton) and has doubled or even tripled the number of students who now start the day with a healthy breakfast at those schools.

Last year, the BOE passed the "Feeding Every Hungry Child" resolution, which formalized what had been a longstanding SNS practice of allowing students who showed up in the cafeteria line with no money, but also not qualified for free meals, to eat at no charge. This practice makes good academic sense, since hungry children can't learn, but it carries a high price tag - in 2008-09, the cost to "feed every hungry child" was about \$877,000. The good news this year is that, thanks to the robust return of meal applications, more students were qualified for free meals, and the deficit generated by the need to provide every student in line with a meal, regardless of whether they qualified for free, decreased to about \$645,000.

However, the cost of "unclaimed" meals - meals which were purchased by the district but not consumed by students - is rapidly increasing. Meals are "unclaimed" when teachers take students off campus for field trips or activities, and neglect to give notice to cafeteria staff in sufficient time to reduce the lunch order for that day; when teachers and other adults are allowed to eat for free, instead of paying the adult price for their meal; when adults and non-SFUSD siblings join their students for breakfast in the school cafeteria without paying; and when meals are ordered but not served due to other food being made available to students in competition with the meal program, including class and school

wide pizza parties, and unauthorized food sales which violate the district's Wellness Policy. The cost of these unclaimed meals was \$539,000 in 2008-09, and will be even higher this school year. The "Feeding Every Hungry Child" resolution specifically mentioned all of these drains on the SNS budget and called for schools to take action to help address the situation, so as to be able to help underwrite the cost of feeding hungry children, but clearly the action taken thus far is not proving effective. More direction needs to be given to site administrators to make sure that their teachers are aware of the field trip notification forms available online at the SNS page of the district website, and schools need to be reminded that competitive food sales are not allowed during the school day.

With installation of the POS completed and Meal Pay Plus up and running, SNS finally has the ability to generate reports showing cash shortages by school and even by student - for the first time it is possible to know exactly who is "charging" (ie - not paying for) their meals and how much those charges are. The "Feeding Every Hungry Child" resolution contained a provision calling for reevaluation at the end of the first semester of the 09-10 school year, to get a sense of what the cost of this "feed everyone" policy was. It is time for the BOE to do this evaluation and make a decision on how to proceed. Is it the will of the board to continue to feed every child and make no attempt to recoup the expense from families, no matter what the cost? Or does the BOE want the district to make at least some attempt to ask the families of students with meal charges accruing to make payment, and if so, who should be making that attempt? The Student Nutrition Committee urges the BOE to come to some resolution of this issue before the start of the next school year. As well, the Board should consider what, if any, action to take with schools which are increasing, rather than decreasing, their number of unclaimed meals.

As the school year began, the state was withholding all federal funding for the school meal programs, while awaiting action by the district to remedy the many program violations which had been uncovered during a system wide review in 08-09. These violations were mainly of the "counting and claiming" variety, in schools where caf workers were not able to check accurately the students' free meal eligibility; no problems at all were related to the food being served. Working with the LEADS, SNS was able to focus the schools' attention on the necessity of complying with USDA regulations (no matter how moronic they may appear to the outside observer), and by midyear the district had passed the follow up review and all withheld funding was released. The state will return for another follow up review in 11-12, so SNS and SNPAC expect to continue to focus on compliance with regulations, so that the district can pass with flying colors on the first try next time. Universal usage of the POS should eliminate virtually all "counting and claiming" errors.

Thank you for your continued support of better nutrition for all of our students. The new school year will bring even more good news about the quality of the food served in our schools, as SNS moves forward with bringing all schools up to the "gold standard" under the HealthierUS Schools Challenge of the USDA, and with a possible involvement in the Chefs Move to Schools program. We look forward to sharing that news with you.