

San Francisco
December 2005

Balboa High School in San Francisco has started a pilot Grab n Go breakfast program, which is believed to be the first of its kind in the Bay Area. The Grab n Go is designed to encourage more students to start the day with a nutritious meal. Students can arrive at school as late as five minutes before the 8:20 start time, grab the pre-bagged breakfast from the cafeteria line, and go right off to class. Breakfast can be eaten during the first ten minutes of class time. The traditional high school breakfast program provides a hot sit-down meal but requires students to arrive 20-30 minutes early.

After three months of operation, about twice as many students are eating the Grab n Go breakfast, compared with sit-down breakfast participation last school year. An average of 165 Grab n Go breakfasts are served daily, nearly all of them to low-income students who qualify for free meals. During the 2004-05 school year, an average of 80 students per day ate breakfast in the cafeteria.

The next step for the program is to implement a computerized Point of Sale (POS) system, which uses swipe-card technology to check students' eligibility for free or reduced price meals. Students have their meal eligibility encoded in the card, so every child swipes their card as they pass the point of sale. Those who are free show up as that, and those who are on paid status have a card which is linked to an account into which their parents deposit money. When they swipe their card, the cost of their meal is automatically deducted from their account. This technology completely eliminates the need for money to change hands. Students pass through the line faster because no one has to check eligibility, collect money, or make change. The stigma of standing in the line is eliminated because no one except the employee viewing the swipe card screen knows who is free and who is paying. The school district saves money because they do not need a courier service to pick up cash and take it to the bank every day, and the extra fees which banks charge for excess deposits per day are eliminated. The technology would also allow the district to identify students who are not qualified and have no money to pay for their lunch. This would make it easier to contact their families and ask them to fill out the lunch form, or to send money to pay for the lunch, thereby reducing or eliminating the cash shortage.

In a survey of 250 "Bal" students conducted last spring, 25% reported that they "never" eat breakfast, while another 50% said that they "sometimes" eat breakfast – meaning that on any given day, somewhere between 25-75% of the student population was coming into their first period classroom with an empty stomach. Among those who said they did eat breakfast, some indicated that the breakfast consisted of soda, potato chips, or other junk food. About 80% of those surveyed indicated that they would like to be able to eat breakfast during the start of first period, and another 15% said they might do so.

The Grab n Go breakfast began with a variety of items, such as cold cereal, bagel and cream cheese, fresh fruit, orange juice, fruit muffin, string cheese, yogurt, and milk. As the weather turned colder, hot items such as a breakfast burrito, pancakes, and pizza bagel have been added to the menu. All breakfasts meet not only USDA requirements, but also the guidelines of the

SFUSD student nutrition policy, which is stricter.

Breakfast is free to students who qualify for free lunch; the cost is 30 cents for those who qualify for reduced price lunch. All others pay \$1.

The implementation of a computerized POS system would not only allow Balboa provide a healthy and nutritious breakfast to more hungry students each school day, but it could also have a positive effect on the academic achievement of those students, and on their long-term health.

Studies have linked eating breakfast with improved concentration in school children, and with helping people reach and maintain a healthy weight.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3092383.stm>

Studies show that children who skip breakfast are twice as likely to be overweight as those who eat breakfast

http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/healthjournal/sep_oct_97_hj/articles/skipping_1.html

Likewise, skipping breakfast has been shown to have a negative impact on cognitive functioning

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2248/is_132_33/ai_53870301

dental health

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2004/01/040115080612.htm>

cholesterol levels and insulin resistance

http://www.diabetesdigest.com/BackIssues/Newsletters/dd_news_3_05_2.htm

to increase the risk of heart disease

<http://my.webmd.com/content/article/100/105818.htm>

and can cause irritability and lethargy

<http://www.newsrecord.org/media/paper693/news/2004/05/26/CollegeLiving/Skipping.Breakfast.Can.Cause.Irritability.Fatigue-690014.shtml>

Additional information on Grab n Go breakfasts

<http://www.breakfastfirst.org/GrabnGo.html>

More on school food in the SFUSD

www.sfusdfood.org

Grab n Go by the numbers

80 – average number of students who ate breakfast in the Balboa cafeteria during 04-05

93 – number of Grab n Go breakfasts served on the first day of the program

165 – average number of Grab n Go breakfasts served in the 3rd week of the program

300 – target goal for participation

55.3 – percentage of Balboa students who qualified for free or reduced price meals (as of 12/05)