

## SCHOOL BREAKFAST OF THE FUTURE TRIPLES PARTICIPATION

February 10, 2007

San Francisco - - San Francisco's Balboa High School has brought its innovative Grab n Go breakfast program into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the start of service just inside the front door to school. An average of over 230 students per day now get the school breakfast, compared with an average of 80 previously. Grab n Go is designed to encourage more students to start the day with a nutritious meal.

Using Point of Sale (POS) technology, students are able to swipe their ID card rather than showing a meal eligibility card to cover the cost of their meal. The use of meal cards, which require an employee to find and check off a student number on a grid to determine eligibility for subsidized meals, slows delivery. There is also a stigma attached to waiting in line for a "free" breakfast which drives many students to skip school meal participation altogether. The POS system provides every student, regardless of their status for reimbursable meals, with an identical card, and at the swipe point, no distinction is made (except inside the computer) between a student eligible for free meals and one who would be expected to pay. The system allows parents to charge up an online account with money to cover the cost of their student's paid meals, so no cash need ever change hands.

Grab n Go has been available at Balboa since September 2005, but until late January 2007, students still had to go to the cafeteria to get their food. They could arrive at school as late as five minutes before the 8:20 start time, grabbed 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.

Although breakfast participation doubled during the 05-06 school year to about 165 students per day, as compared to about 80 students the previous year, there were still far too many students coming through the front door at the start of school with no time left to head to the cafeteria before class. The new POS system located in the school lobby attempts to capture these customers too, literally putting the breakfast into their hands as they are walking to class.

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 also allows the district to identify students who are not qualified and have no money to pay for their school meals. This makes it easier to contact their families and ask them to fill out the meal application form, or to send money to pay for the school meals, thereby reducing or eliminating the cash shortage.

The pilot POS equipment was made possible at Balboa thanks to a grant from the Department of

Children, Youth, and their Families. The same grant has also paid for a POS system at Bessie Carmichael Elementary in the South of Market neighborhood, although those students still eat their meals in the cafeteria. DCYF grants will fund POS pilots at two other sites – Tenderloin Elementary and Marina Middle School - later in 2007.

**Grab n Go by the Numbers**

- 80** - average number of students who ate school breakfast at Balboa in 2004-05
- 165** - average number of students who ate Grab n Go breakfast at Balboa in 2005-06
- 175** - average number of students who ate Grab n Go during the 4 weeks prior to beginning lobby service in January 2007
- 230** - average number of students who ate Grab n Go breakfast during the first two weeks of service in the lobby late January-February 2007
- 1080** - Balboa enrollment January 2007
- 60** – percentage of Balboa students qualified for free/reduced price meals in January 07