

An Investment in the Health of San Francisco's Students

Executive Summary of First Year of the San Francisco Unified School District's Salad Bar Program

Background

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) Student Nutrition Services (SNS) Department operates the largest public food service program in San Francisco, serving students from all schools and neighborhoods. Each day, SNS provides over 31,000 meals to students in San Francisco through federal meal programs-School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program and the after-school snack program.

Generally, students in SFUSD do not consume the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables each day. Results from the 2007 Community Healthy Kids Survey indicated that only 29% of 9th graders, 37% of 10th graders, 36% of 11th graders, and 37% of 12th grade students ate green salad or other vegetables one or more times during the seven days preceding the survey.

The National School Lunch Program serves primarily students from low income households: 84% of the students that ate school lunch in 2006-2007 were qualified for free and reduced meals (they come from families with earnings below 185% of the federal poverty level or a max of \$33,203 for a family of four). For some students, school lunch may be the only balanced meal they eat each day.

While these facts combine to make SNS one of the most important public food service programs in San Francisco, investment in the operations of SNS has been minimal over the past three decades. With insufficient and/or aging kitchen equipment, rising food, transportation and labor costs, improving the school lunch program requires a reinvestment into this program.



Salad Bar Implementation

The salad bar program was created in response to several high priority issues. Many middle and high school students found the portions provided in school lunch inadequate, and the hungry students regularly requested additional food. Furthermore, SNS has prioritized piloting ways to increase the amount of fresh produce offered to students through school meals. The key ideas behind a salad bar program are to offer fresh, healthy produce, give students choice and allow them to control their own serving sizes. A salad bar pilot project conducted in 2004 by San Francisco Food Systems demonstrated that salad bars in public schools can be an effective way to increase students' consumption of fresh produce.

The salad bar program was funded by the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families and the Mayor's Office. Salad bars were rolled out at 25 schools during the 2007-2008 school years. Schools included eight elementary schools, six middle schools, and six high schools. \$234,000 was funded for operations, and \$280,000 for equipment purchases.

Description of Evaluation of Salad Bar Program

An evaluation of the salad bars was done during the Spring of 2008. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine how many students were choosing salad, approximately how much they were taking, and to document how much was being thrown away. The evaluation consisted of lunchroom observations at thirteen schools on two separate occasions, and also included interviews with cafeteria staff and school principals and focus groups at some middle and high schools. Finally, the evaluation included a take-home survey sent to all parents at elementary and middle schools with salad bars. Data was collected on a total of 450 students at 13 school sites (5 elementary, 4 middle, and 4 high schools), 36 administrative staff, 14 cafeteria employees, and 1,953 parents.

A Few General Findings

- ◆ About half of all observed students took items from the salad bar.
 - ◆ Overall, participation in the school lunch program increased at the schools with salad bars.
 - ◆ Most of the students are eating the salad they take.
 - ◆ Parents of students using the salad bar are reporting positive feedback.
 - ◆ The majority of school staff interviewed felt the salad bar has been a good addition to their school.
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Further Findings

Student Participation in the Lunch Line

Figure 1. Students chose the following items from the lunch line:

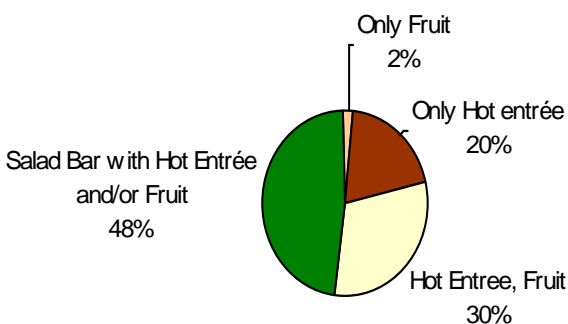


Figure 2. How much salad did each student take?



48% of the students had items from the salad bar at lunch.

Twelve schools saw an increase in participation of the lunch program of over 10%.

Student Nutrition Services & School Staff — Interview Results

A total of 50 staff were interviewed.

86% of cafeteria staff felt that students' consumption of vegetables has increased since the start of the salad bar.

97% of administrative staff felt that the salad bar has been a good addition to the school.

Quotes from Staff Interviews...

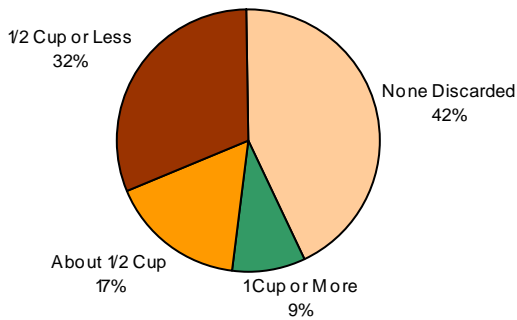
They love having the choice of how much food they can take, and it is a good option separate from the cooked entrée.

— SNS Employee

Kids talk at lunch about how they should eat veggies because they are healthy.

— School Staff

Figure 3. For the 450 students observed, how much salad was not eaten and thrown into the trash?



Parent Survey Results

A total of 1953 parents responded. Please note, results reflect responses from parents whose child eats school lunch at least once a week. (1411 total)

- ♦ 66% of parents reported that because of the salad bar, they were happier with the choices their child has for school lunch.
- ♦ 71% of parents reported that the salad bar had helped their child eat more fruits and vegetables.
- ♦ 75% reported that since the inception of the salad bar their child know how to identify more kinds of fruits and vegetables.

Quotes from Parent Surveys...

I had no idea until now that my child's school had a salad bar. I would be willing to pay a higher property tax or other fee for all kids to have better food choices at school.

— Parent/Caregiver, West Portal ES

My son used to prefer my home cooking lunches, but now he prefers school lunch because he said he likes the salad bar's food.

— Parent/Caregiver, Starr King ES

She loves the salad bar. And actually enjoys vegetables much more now.

— Parent/Caregiver, Chin ES

We love it. Seriously, my kids wouldn't eat anything green before the salad bar. Now he loves broccoli!

— Parent/Caregiver, Harvey Milk ES

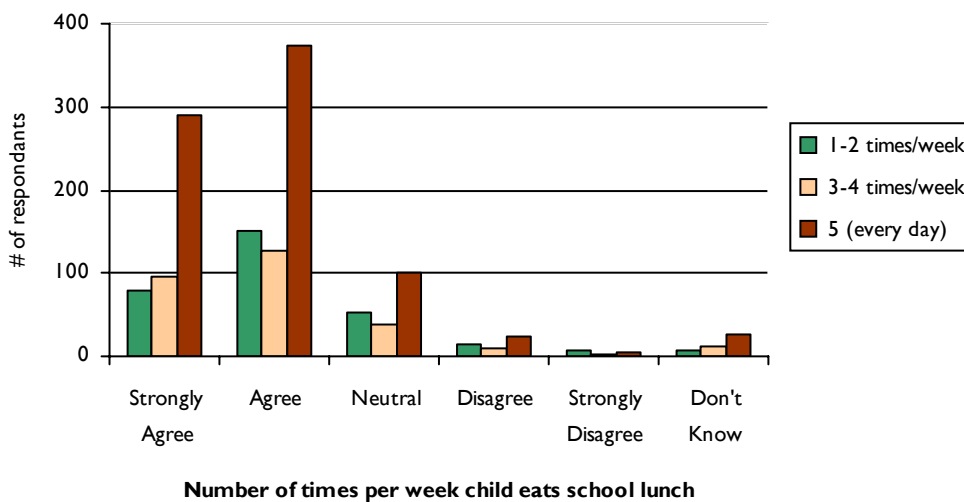
Applauds for providing alternative choices for our children, by offering fresher fruits and vegetables rather than packaged foods which are not appetizing. I know my child eats better and is willing to eat school lunches.

— Parent/Caregiver, West Portal ES

Is there any way that kids who bring their own lunches can go to the salad bar. Can we contribute \$ to cover costs?

— Parent/Caregiver, Starr King ES

Figure 4. My child knows how to identify more kinds of fruits and vegetables as a result of the salad bar program.



Procurement

The salad bars featured organic lettuce during 2008, and also featured seasonal vegetables that were grown in California.

Challenges & Opportunities

- ◆ Insufficient funding to pay for the extra hours of labor for chopping and food preparation in house at SFUSD required sourcing pre-cut produce from vendors.
- ◆ At times, the quality of the produce provided by produce vendors was inconsistent.
- ◆ There was a lack of linkages to other school programs such as nutrition and health education and gardening, although the program offers educational opportunities to make such linkages.
- ◆ Students and parents request greater variety on salad bars.
- ◆ Often, there is insufficient time for students to eat.

Recommendations: Reinvest in San Francisco's Public School Food System

- ◆ Fund coordination of salad bars and the development of linkages to health education, as well as communication with parents about the salad bar.
- ◆ Continued investing in the SFUSD meal program. City agencies should collaborate with SFUSD to explore alternative mechanisms to increase local level funding to the school lunch program.

Participating Organizations

San Francisco Unified School District, Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, Department of Public Health, University of California Cooperative Extension – Children's Power Play! Campaign, Urban Sprouts, Pie Ranch, Next Course, interns from the following schools: University of California San Francisco, University of California Berkeley, San Francisco State University, and Lowell High School.

The full report will be available in December, 2008 at: www.dcyf.org; www.sffood.org; www.sfusdfood.org

(Photo on front page is from Bret Harte Elementary School.)



Office of the Mayor

