

Improving Meal Quality in California's Schools

A Best Practices Guide for Healthy School Food Service

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California Food Policy Advocates

California Food Policy Advocates is a public policy and advocacy organization whose mission is to improve the health and well-being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious and affordable food.

CFPA is California's only statewide advocacy organization with a focus on food and nutrition for low-income people. The organization's work emphasizes the critical importance of preserving, improving, and expanding participation in the federal food programs, the state's strongest tool in overcoming malnutrition and hunger. CFPA works with community-based organizations to identify critical food access problems and to mobilize effective solutions to them.

CFPA uses research and analysis, advocacy, and community education and mobilization to ensure that every Californian has access to the nutrition required to grow, to learn, and to lead a productive life. Many of our reports, including this one, are available online at www.cfpa.net.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

California, as well as the United States, is experiencing an epidemic of obesity that has had and will continue to have devastating health and economic consequences. Public health leaders have made the case that all sectors of society must take on their share of meeting this challenge. In California, the Strategic Alliance for Healthy Food & Activity Environments (www.preventioninstitute.org/strategic.html) is bringing together a broad spectrum of organizations to develop a coordinated, environmental approach to addressing this challenge.

Schools present a wealth of opportunities to respond effectively to the obesity epidemic. This report showcases the food- and nutrition-oriented strategies of more than a dozen schools. Their diverse efforts include increasing access to nutrition programs, improving their quality and supporting school food services through policy development and collaboration. In producing this report, California Food Policy Advocates hopes to provide schools across the state with case studies that will both inspire and inform the next generation of school-based obesity prevention efforts.

In addition, this report seeks to connect the policies of individual schools with statewide actions under consideration in California. The two need not be in conflict. Public policies can serve as the articulation of baseline standards appropriate for all children in all schools. Local policies can build on this foundation and reflect community priorities. The case studies in this report both stem from statewide policy and will likely inspire policymakers to take next steps. In the years of developing federal, state and local responses to the obesity epidemic, it has become clear that all are needed to craft effective and equitable solutions.

The Role of Schools in Promoting Healthy Diets

In 1946, our nation created the National School Lunch Program to help fight hunger. The program's premise, which remains true today, is that schools represent a key opportunity to provide children with the nutrition they need to thrive in the classroom, on the playing field and in their communities. In California alone, more than

2.7 million children each day eat a school lunch, including more than 2 million low-income children who eat for free or at a reduced price. Studies show that eating nutritious meals, such as those provided through the National School Lunch Program and (beginning in 1966) the School Breakfast Program, improves academic performance, reduces behavior problems and increases school attendance.ⁱ With 447,000 children hungry in California and more than 2 million "food insecure,"ⁱⁱ the need for our continued investment in these valuable programs remains clear.

Even as hunger continues to plague California and the nation, the health crises of overweight and obesity have reached epidemic proportions. Sixty percent of American adults are overweight, with just under 30 percent obese.ⁱⁱⁱ More than 30 percent of American adolescents are overweight or at risk of overweight.^{iv} Overweight rates have undergone a three-fold increase in just 20 years. Obesity and overweight are health problems for all income groups. In California, data analysis by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy found no state Assembly district immune from crisis-level rates of overweight among children.^v

The consequences of overweight and obesity will continue to be dire. Medical experts link overweight and obesity with diabetes, heart problems and certain cancers. Already, the Surgeon General estimated in 2001 that 300,000 deaths per year are attributable to obesity.^{vi}

The epidemic of obesity is, sadly, the subject of controversy. Some have misinterpreted data to argue that the obesity epidemic is "proof" that hunger is no longer a factor in the United States. In fact, as the data above demonstrate, both hunger and obesity exist and both have serious economic, health, social and education costs to California.

Even more importantly, obesity and hunger share a solution. The nation created the National School Lunch Program to provide an intensive response to hunger; now, this same anti-hunger infrastructure is playing a crucial role in addressing the obesity epidemic.

USDA, which regulates the nutritional profile of meals served through the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program, has already taken steps towards maximizing the obesity-prevention potential of these programs. In 1995, USDA implemented the School Meals Initiative, which set new nutrition standards and menu development protocols. A study conducted three years later found promising results: children who ate school lunches consumed more fruits, vegetables, calcium and certain

vitamins than those who did not. Fat levels in the school meals have also decreased significantly.^{vii} As USDA meals continue to improve, their role in obesity prevention will become even more significant.

Protecting Our Investment: Strengthening the School Food Environment

California is a leader among states in recognizing a key truth about the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program: that no matter how strong their nutritional standards, their success depends on the quality of the whole school food environment in which they operate. Unless the environment supports USDA nutritional goals, the investment made by both the federal and state government will be at least partially squandered.

Competitive foods (including a la carte foods sold by the school food service, school stores run by students and PTAs and vendor-managed vending machines and food courts) can be the biggest threat to the obesity-fighting potential of USDA school meals. Competitive foods can be healthy products (such as low-fat yogurt, fruit salads, etc.)—but there is no guarantee. Instead, these foods are often brand-name high-fat, high-salt or high-sugar fast food meals and snacks.^{viii} Competitive foods are disallowed from sale in the cafeteria (or food service area) during meal times only if they fall into the limited category of "Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value" (sodas, hard candies, gum and other specific foods.) Otherwise, they are not subjected to nutrition or portion-size standards.^{ix} Profits from their sale are allowed to accrue to either the food service department or an approved student organization.^x Thus, they may detract from the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program in two ways:^{xi}

- Their brand-name allure and familiarity—created by billions of marketing dollars—draw students away from the nutritionally sound USDA programs. Also, their presence may stigmatize participation in the National School Lunch Program, making eligible children unwilling to sign up for free or reduced-price meals and higher-income children unwilling to purchase the healthier meals. This image problem is likely to be especially severe for older students.
- When sold by students, PTAs or other clubs, they draw money away from the school food service department, which could use the funds to invest not only in nutritious foods, but in infrastructure improvements (such as modern kitchen facilities) that would help the school provide healthy and appealing meals.

Competitive foods remain one of the single greatest challenges to improving the obesity-prevention potential of the school meal programs. Many individual schools and districts are trying to identify their appropriate role in responding to this contributing factor of the obesity epidemic; California legislators and Governor Davis have also made it a priority to explore a statewide response. They identified competitive foods as a critical issue and crafted the Pupil Nutrition, Health and Achievement Act of 2001 (SB19, Escutia) to enable the state to reduce the negative impact of competitive foods on children's health. The law has four main provisions:

- The establishment of nutrition standards for elementary schools. Meal-time food sales may only consist of full USDA-approved meals. Snacks must meet nutritional standards similar to those governing the meals themselves. As a result of these changes, parents will be assured that their children will choose their meals and snacks from an array of healthy options—not junk.
- Soda policies that recognize soda's link to increased "empty" calorie consumption and weight gain. In elementary schools, sodas are banned completely. In middle schools, the soda ban is in effect until the last lunch period. Schools are beginning to document their capacity to maintain (or even increase) profits by selling competitively priced water, juice and milk alongside fewer soda options, suggesting that the next step (eliminating soda entirely) does not spell financial disaster, as industry officials would like schools to believe. A few schools have, indeed, demonstrated leadership in this aspect of school nutrition and are managing the changes in their "school food economy" well.
- An increase in reimbursement by the state for elementary and middle school meals. SB19 recognizes that schools may need support to manage the implementation of the new nutrition policies, make the transition from their reliance on profits from unhealthy food sales to those from healthier food sales and purchase additional fresh fruit, vegetables and other components of nutritious meals and snacks.
- The establishment of pilot projects to test nutrition standards in high schools and middle schools. These pilot projects will be evaluated to identify best practices for expanding SB19 standards to all schools.

Given the state's fiscal crisis, CFPA is working with state and federal partners to identify federal and other potential sources of funds to support the implementation of the meal standards and soda requirements. The pilot projects (known as LEAF grants) were fully funded through USDA funds in January 2003.

In addition to these legislative developments, California's First Lady Sharon Davis has convened the California Child Nutrition Task Force. The Task Force has set the expansion of participation in the School Breakfast Program as its first priority. The Task Force is promoting such innovative models for breakfast delivery as universal classroom breakfast and Grab-n-Go. Universal Classroom Breakfast, in which all children receive free breakfast at their desks, has proven extremely successful in dramatically increasing participation in the School Breakfast Program. It may also play an important role in obesity prevention through several means: (a) it may decrease demand for unhealthy competitive foods at the start of the school day, as well as lunchtime (especially for children who ate their lunches in the morning to make up for missed breakfasts); (b) that decrease in demand may trigger a decrease in supply, if profits from unhealthy competitive food sales falter; and (c) it may increase student acceptance of the school meal programs—breakfast and lunch—and thus help eliminate the stigma of participation.

Next Steps: Local Action & Policy Development

The case studies in this report are just a few examples of policy changes in progress at schools. For example, numerous districts have followed the examples of Oakland Unified School District, Los Angeles Unified Schools District and others in limiting one or more unhealthy products, such as sodas or junk foods. We applaud all districts that are developing and implementing sound nutrition policies and hope this report will encourage other schools and districts to follow their lead, as well as buttress statewide action.

As you read the case studies in this report, identify the ones that would make the most sense in your school. You should feel free to seek advice from the contacts provided with each model program. Please keep CFPA posted on your progress. CFPA anticipates updating the case studies in Summer 2003 and is eager to hear about your experiences.

Also, consider the public policy environment that would help you further your goal of creating school environments that support good nutrition. Your experience working with your school administration, food service department, school board, student body, PTA and others will make you a valuable voice as state policies are crafted.

This year will be an active one in the California Legislature. Eager to follow-up on the Pupil Nutrition, Health and Achievement Act, legislators have introduced more than fifteen bills that propose the next steps for building an effective, statewide, coordinated response to the obesity epidemic. This year's bills address the full scope of school-based obesity prevention, including school food and beverage policy, school physical

education policy and nutrition education.¹ (A few bills also address non-school initiatives.) At press time, CFPA is building our website's Legislative Tracking Page (www.cfpa.net), which will provide updates on bill amendments, hearings and opportunities for action. The text and status of all California bills are also available at www.leginfo.ca.gov. Sign up for CFPA's weekly Action Alert to stay informed on opportunities to promote an obesity prevention agenda.

In addition, at a national level, the Child Nutrition Programs (including the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program) are being "reauthorized" this year by Congress. These programs, despite their important role in promoting children's nutrition and academic achievement, are under serious threat. Your help is needed to preserve their long-standing contributions to children in California and nationwide. We encourage you to contact CFPA to find out how you can become involved.

Background: Key Reports & Research Findings

SB19 and the legislation introduced this year emerged within the context of the recent state and national debates about how schools can best promote nutrition and prevent obesity. Five key reports have played an important role in creating this environment and deserve special mention:

- **The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity (2001).**

<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity>

This forceful report by Surgeon General David Satcher outlines the scope of the crisis, its health and economic consequences and a variety of approaches needed to create a comprehensive response. The report addresses head-on one of the key misconceptions about the obesity epidemic: "Many people believe that dealing with overweight and obesity is a personal responsibility. To some degree they are right, but it is also a community responsibility...When school lunchrooms or office cafeterias do not provide healthy and appealing food choices, that is a community responsibility." Later in the report, one of the recommendations for action speaks directly to statewide advocates, "...[G]overnments can create and promote policies that promote an environment in which healthy dietary and physical activity options are readily acceptable."

¹ *CFPA supports a comprehensive approach to obesity prevention. Given our mission statement and expertise with the federal food programs, the Food Quality Team focuses its efforts on school-based nutrition policy.*

• **UC Berkeley's Center for Weight and Health**, *"Improving Children's Academic Performance, Health and Quality of Life: A Top Policy Commitment in Response to the Children's Obesity and Health Crisis in California"* (2000). *"Pediatric Overweight: A Review of the Literature"* (2001).

<http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu.cwh>.

These two reports provide advocates with access to the complex research about the prevalence of overweight, its causes and implications and opportunities for intervention.

• **USDA**, *"School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study II: Summary of Findings."* (2001).

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/CNP/FILES/SNDAIIfindsum.htm>

This report provides an analysis of the improvements made in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program, following the implementation of the School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children in 1995.

• **Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services**, *"Foods Sold in Competition with USDA School Meal Programs: A Report to Congress"* (2001).

This report provides background information on competitive foods and outlines an agenda for improving the policy environment.

For more information, please see the Food Quality section of CFPA's website at www.cfpa.net. We will keep you posted on the growing list of websites, clearinghouses and other sources of research, policy models and case studies.

ⁱ For example, see <http://www.projectbread.org/MCHI/mghbreakfaststudy.htm> for one such study. See www.cfpa.net for additional resources.

ⁱⁱ See www.centeronhunger.org/states/ca.html, Table 3, "Hunger and Food Insecurity in the Fifty States."

ⁱⁱⁱ US Office of the Surgeon General, 2001.

^{iv} CALTEENS (Foerster, 2000), as cited in *The Center on Weight and Health*, *Pediatric Overweight: A Review of the Literature*, June 2001.

^v See www.publichealthadvocacy.org.

^{vi} Surgeon General, 2001.

^{vii} USDA, *School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study II*, April 2001.

^{viii} CDC study cited in Elizabeth Becker & Marion Burros, "Eat Your Vegetables? Only at a Few Schools," *New York Times*, January 13, 2003, A1.

^{ix} Shirley R. Watkins, *"Foods Sold in Competition with USDA School Meal Programs: A Report to Congress,"* January 12, 2001.

^x Center on Weight and Health, 2001.

^{xi} See Shirley Watkins, *"Foods Sold in Competition with USDA School Meal Programs"* for additional discussion.

Practices to Increase Participation in NSLP

Best Practice: Offering more choices while limiting competitive food sales

Folsom Cordova Unified School District, Sacramento County, Alajos Schieder, 916.355.1180, aschiede@fcusd.k12.ca.us; www.fcusd.k12.ca.us

Folsom Cordova Unified School District has made an enormous change to the foods available to the district's students – all competitive, junk and ala carte foods and soda sales have been eliminated entirely throughout the district's food service department. Concerned about student nutrition, Al Schieder, Folsom Cordova's school food service director, cancelled the soda and vending contracts and focused on attracting students through high quality meals. Thinking like a business person – Al's background is in private industry – FCUSD created a business plan in which these meals, by attracting more students, would more than pay for themselves.

FCUSD cut out a la carte foods completely: the high school menu does not even include a price list. Instead, the district offers the same eight choices – including teriyaki rice bowls, California roll sushi, udon soup, tortilla wraps, tortellini and fettucine – every day. This makes sense financially, as the menu never changes and planning is very easy. At the same time, the cafeteria environment has been radically transformed – a "completely new environment for the kids," according to Al. It is set up as a food court, features brightly colored banners above the food line and attractively presented lunch options. The servers have taken off their hair nets and now wear uniforms with berets.

According to Al, the changes have been slowly won – "change is hard." Still, these changes have paid for themselves. In 1995, FCUSD had sales of approximately \$1.8 million, and a net loss of \$220,000. In 2001, sales reached \$3.2 million, labor costs had

decreased as a percentage, and the program generated \$400,000 in reserves, which allowed for the redesign of the cafeterias. Al considers that he is "in business" to make nutritious meals. He is willing to make investments in his program that will pay back down the line. (While the special sushi machine that they bought was expensive, the California rolls are cheap to produce and the department was able to recoup the cost fairly quickly.)

Significantly, these investments also have allowed FCUSD to increase free and reduced-price participation. For example, in 1995 at Cordova High School, 500 students qualified for free and reduced-price meals, but only 120 lined up in the stigmatizing free lunch line. Now there is no separate line, and Cordova High serves over 800 school lunches. And over 400 needy students participate daily.

Best Practice: Creating attractive eating environments and eliminating co-payments

**Corona-Norco Unified School District, Riverside County,
Meg Chesley, 909.736.3256;
<http://www.campuscatering.org/>**

Corona-Norco's cafeteria renovations have been key in increasing NSLP participation. The schools now boast eight themed dining areas, ranging from a summer camp theme at an elementary school, to a 50's diner theme at a junior high school, to sports bar and Old West themed cafeterias in two of the high schools. Most of the renovations were done with child nutrition funds, but one was a collaboration with vendors, and one was paid for exclusively through facilities funds – primarily a grant from the state for school modernization – that also paid for better equipment and improved cooking facilities. The renovations range from the simple to the fancy: from murals painted by nutrition staff themselves, to the "cow bus," an indoor dining facility at a continuation high school that was created out of a donated school bus. One cafeteria, Santiago High School's "Shark Tank" site, features four satellite preparation and serving kitchens, one in each academic wing.

Meg and her staff have found that students' attitudes toward school food service changed dramatically with the renovations. Of course, the staff also strive to provide nutritious foods that students like. Meg's long-range vision is to transform parents', students', and teachers' opinions of school food and to make the cafeteria their first choice as a place to eat.

In another effort to increase participation, Corona-Norco eliminated the co-payment for reduced-price meals. The district found that higher participation by these students offset the loss of income from co-payments. At the time of this change, students who qualified for free meals participated at a rate of about 75%, while only 55% of reduced-price students participated. Assuming that the participation rates would equalize if the copayment were dropped, Meg figured that her reimbursement for the reduced-price group could be about 10% higher.

In fact, with the elimination of the co-payment, reduced-price students participate at a higher rate than the students qualifying for free meals. The number of eligible students overall has increased, and the district has seen a shift from free to reduced-price students. Meg cautions that there is no magic number that determines whether eliminating the co-payment is cost effective – it depends on the number of students who qualify, the number participating, the prices for lunch and the cost of providing the meal.

Best Practice: Feeding hungry kindergartners

Hawthorne School District, Los Angeles County,
Amy Beckstrom, 310.219.2848 Ext 209, abeckstrom@hawthorne.k12.ca.us;
<http://www.hawthorne.k12.ca.us/educators/Default.htm>

Hawthorne, a K-8 district, has very high free and reduced-price participation: over 80% of their students qualify for a free or reduced-price school meal. One of the district's key innovations to increase participation has centered upon kindergarten students. While half-day kindergartners were eligible for free lunches, the schools did not advertise the service because they had no one to monitor these young children during lunch. Kindergartners were generally "shooed away" from campus at lunchtime, and kindergarten lunch participation was therefore only 5%.

Unable to fix the supervision problem for the half-day students, Amy and her staff decided instead to provide reimbursable lunches for kindergartners during snack break. Teachers and administrators worried about the time it would take, but Amy found that she could offer a healthy meal in the same amount of time as their usual snack time. Participation went from 5% to 95%, with the revenue from increased participation supporting the extra food and labor costs. The program won teacher support because no classroom time was lost and teachers received additional classroom tools in the form of nutrition-themed coloring pages. In Hawthorne, morning kindergartners are now guaranteed two meals a day, while afternoon kindergartners get a nutritious lunch.

Best Practice: On-site preparation of homemade foods

**Healdsburg Unified School District, Sonoma County,
Nancy May, 707.431.3434, nmay@husd.com;
<http://www.husd.com/directoryservices.html>**

The Healdsburg USD food service staff under Nancy has focused on weaning students off branded items and replacing them with homemade foods. Previously, the district contracted with a vendor that provided prepackaged and frozen meals unpopular with students and food service staff alike. Healdsburg schools now prepare meals on-site, and the staff takes pleasure in preparing the meals and serving them to happier customers. The high school offers a salad bar featuring produce from the Network of Sonoma City Farmers. Each school has a garden, and the school produce is included in the menus whenever possible. Healdsburg has even started to accept produce from students' family farms to decorate the cafeteria and use as surplus.

The high school has a fairly new cafeteria, paid for by a districtwide bond for school remodels. In addition to allowing more food choices for students, the process of cafeteria construction proved an opportunity to involve the wider school community in nutrition education. Nancy enlisted the Board of Trustees (school board) to support efforts to restrict sales of branded items with an honest and descriptive presentation and samples of the food. Board members and the superintendent volunteered to prepare meals in the new kitchens, an experience that greatly increased their understanding of the importance of school food. Nancy also has worked closely with parents to involve them in student nutrition. She attends PTO meetings, bringing food samples and encouraging parents to use the food service department for their events.

Participation has increased greatly at the elementary schools with the introduction of fresh foods. In the junior high school, a la carte participation is up, and school lunch participation increased in the first year before leveling off. A new salad bar at the junior high school has improved participation rates this year.

Unfortunately, competitive foods remain a serious challenge at the high school. The campus is more open than it had previously been, and lunch numbers are off this year as a result. (Students do participate at their morning break, when food services offers a hot breakfast, featuring breakfast burritos, roasted potatoes, and other items.) A la carte items sold at the junior high and high school are as nutritious and low-fat as possible (i.e. goldfish crackers, wheat thins). While Healdsburg still has a few years to go on a 10-year Pepsi contract, Nancy has limited soda to the

high school vending machines and is replacing the soda with waters, Odwalla juices, and a local organic apple juice. Two snack machines remain at the high school but, again, Nancy lets them sit empty sometimes and has pulled candy in favor of other items.

Best Practice: Controlling vending contracts

Tracy Unified School District, San Joaquin County
Paula Weeks, 209.830.3255, pweeks@tusd.net;
<http://www.tracy.k12.ca.us/business/food/>

Tracy USD is unusual in that Paula Weeks keeps tight control over all contracts with vendors that sell food outside the cafeteria. She negotiates a single contract for the entire district, and her close involvement at this level has three primary benefits for school nutrition services. First, she can ensure that the vending contracts are in line with federal regulations. Second, she has greater control over the types of food offered through the machines. Third, food services get significant revenues from the contracts –25% of all commission sales outside the cafeterias – because of the economies of scale that a single contract permits. These monies, in turn, allow Paula and her staff to make other healthy changes within the district.

While they still offer promotional items – like Little Caesar’s pizza – with certain meals, Tracy is increasingly focused on fresh and less packaged foods. Paula has concentrated the foods with limited nutritional value at one point-of-sale (POS) while offering more nutritious items at the rest of their carts and snack bars, thus increasing the percentage of revenue from healthier a la carte and reimbursable meal points of sales. Furthermore, new serving, refrigeration and heating equipment has allowed more on-site preparation and fresher menu options. Paula has worked with a company to design outside kiosks for use in food court areas and designated food court areas on new school plans. The proceeds from the vending contract have supported purchasing the outside kiosks that offer Tracy students more variety, upscale and healthier foods. (The district, with 16,000 students, has low free and reduced-price numbers, and a high paying population. The a la carte options are a major focus in the district.)

While the Tracy school board adopted a policy eliminating the sale of homemade food from campuses and restricting competitive sales, Paula plans to go back to the board to seek a stricter version. While the elementary and junior high schools are in compliance with the policy, the high school store is sometimes in direct competition with food services. The district administration, which is heavily dependent on its share of the vending machine

commissions, actively supports and enforces Paula's decisions.

She strongly encourages adopting a board nutrition policy that supports the food services department, meeting with stakeholders about competitive food sale options, and emphasizing that vendors support school associations (i.e. by honoring bid pricing, donations, etc.).

Practices to Expand Healthy Offerings

Best Practice: Healthy Alternatives in Elementary Schools

Alisal Union School District, Monterey County
Suzanne Du Verrier, 831.753.5776; <http://www.salinas.k12.ca.us/>

This K-6 district has been a trailblazer in streamlining food service administration and paperwork. For example, Alisal USD piloted the Provision 2 program, beginning in 1990. More recently, Alisal spearheaded the development of the Summer Food Seamless Waiver, which permits school districts to operate the summer food program under the much simpler NSLP rules. (The Seamless Waiver has proved to be so successful that USDA has encouraged school districts throughout the country to adopt it as a means of expanding participation in the program.) The District has used money saved through participation in these programs on a concerted campaign to improve food quality.

In order to meet 5-A-Day goals, Alisal is establishing salad bars in all 11 of its schools; as of 2002 seven of these are in place. Students like the salad bars a lot, and Suzanne credits the preparation done with teachers and parents for this success. Before each salad bar is rolled out, food service staff first attend a teachers' meeting to explain the nutritional basis for the salad bar and how teachers can help students eat well from the bar. Next, food service staff go to every classroom to discuss salad bar etiquette and nutrition with students. Finally, letters are sent to parents explaining salad bar rules ("don't take more than you can eat," etc.) and asking for parent support.

Although Alisal has no a la carte sales or vending machines, and sells no soda or chips, Suzanne continues to work with schools on alternatives to candy sale fundraisers. At one school, parents chose to purchase granola bars through the food service department (at a discount) instead of selling chocolate. Working cooperatively with site administrators is an important component of this program's success. For example, on testing days the breakfast

program runs later, so that principals and teachers can be sure that all students get a good meal at the beginning of the day. Through the district's Nutrition Network grant, Alisal staff perform extensive nutrition education in the classroom – especially with 4th and 5th grades – and with migrant, ESL, and early childhood parents. Partnerships with WIC and Project Lean contribute to the program's success.

Best Practice: Healthy POS options

**Anaheim City Elementary, Anaheim Union High School,
Orange County, Terry Pangborn, 714.999.3560;
http://www.auhsd.k12.ca.us/Food_Services/Catering/Index.htm**

The Anaheim food service department is working to offer kids more choices. At the elementary level, students choose from five entrée selections along with daily offerings of fresh fruits and vegetables. The high schools feature salad bars as well as a la carte fresh fruit and vegetable trays.

The Healthy Food Cart, offering lower fat items such as salads with low fat dressing and nonfat yogurt, has been particularly effective. Anaheim Union's lunch period is only 25 minutes and the campus is closed, so the cart – which serves as many as 150 students per day – is essential to serving healthy food to a large number of students. The snack bars now offer healthier alternatives as well (though students are still able to purchase candy, chips, and soda from the student stores). More fruits and vegetables have meant increased costs to the food program, but Terry has managed to keep the program in the black.

Best Practice: Healthy midmorning snacks

**Carlsbad Unified School District, San Diego County,
Howard Sonkin, 760.918.2084;
<http://www.carlsbadusd.k12.ca.us/food.htm>**

Chips and carbonated drinks are out at Carlsbad's elementary schools, and sunflower kernels, string cheese, and bottled water are in. Recognizing the need for a midmorning snack in the elementary schools, Howard and staff took advantage of the district's small size (eight elementary schools) and implemented the snack program districtwide. While it requires additional staff, the midmorning snack has been positively received by hungry kids, and is one of the food service department's most successful practices. In several of the eight schools, the snack is a reimbursable breakfast for children who didn't get breakfast before school. CUSD has structured food costs in the program to break even.

While school food service does not sell candy or soda at either of the district's two high schools (one large, one small), students are happy with a variety of meal and a la carte choices, and healthier drinks. Carlsbad offers a vegetarian entrée daily, as well as choices of fresh fruit and vegetables, and offers a brunch period in the middle and high schools. Unfortunately, competition continues in the form of vending machines – a major fundraiser for the Associated Student Body – and a student store, a program of the school's marketing class, that sells soda, chips, and cookies, and even delivers snacks to school groups meeting during mealtimes. Efforts to rein in the competitive sales, which have prevented food services from breaking even at the high school for several years, continue.

Best Practice: Celebrating locally grown produce

**Chico Unified School District, Butte County,
Joel Adema, 530.891.3022, foodsvcs@cusd.chico.k12.ca.us;
<http://www.chicousd.org/nutrition/index.html>**

Chico's food service program emphasizes locally grown fruits – apples, kiwis, and mandarin oranges – and tries to use local farmers and brokers. Each year, in collaboration with the Chico Food Project, a community food group that encourages the use of locally grown produce, Chico Unified sponsors Farm City Week, a program that has expanded to two weeks of activities. Farm City Week promotes local agriculture and educates students – and adults – about local farmers. Students learn where and how fruits and vegetables are grown and processed, touring farms, markets, and processing centers.

Despite competitive sales at the high school from nearby restaurants, vending machines, and the student store, the program has for several years sold only Gatorade, Snapple, and water, and has remained in the black. School meals now include more fresh fruits and vegetables; junior high and high schools have salad bars. Chico works with 5-A-Day and SHAPE, and a recent grant for nutrition education has allowed for the training of food service staff and teachers.

Best Practice: Emphasizing whole foods

**Paso Robles Joint Unified School District, San Luis Obispo County, Rod Blackner, 805.237.3346 Ext 132,
rblackner@king.prps.k12.ca.us; <http://king.prps.k12.ca.us/food/>**

Paso Robles Joint USD's food service department focuses on "whole foods." Among other innovations, Paso Robles has for over a decade offered homemade, high-protein, low-fat breads,

made largely from vegetables, as part of the NSLP. Elementary school salad bars offer the breads along with a wide range of vegetables and legumes, and at the secondary level Rod and his staff offer five entrée choices including a homemade hot entrée, a vegetarian offering, their own bean/cheese burrito, and a fully reimbursable meal from the salad bars.

Paso Robles' Culinary Arts Academy teaches restaurant-level cooking skills. The two-year program is equivalent to a freshman year at a culinary college. The Academy offers catering services to district and outside clients, and these services brought in over \$250,000 last year. The Academy also incorporates nutrition education, teaching elementary students through hands-on activities such as making bread or fruit turnovers. Even without revenue from the Academy and catering, Rod's program is solvent, and participation, as well as revenue, has increased at a steady 5-10% each year.

A new blast chiller and other equipment in Paso Robles' central kitchen – paid for in part by catering revenues – have improved meal quality and variety. The blast chiller allows them to cool 2000 portions of Sloppy Joe mix, for example, and then package it and serve it the next day at the various school sites. Salad bars have decreased expenses (less waste) and excited students. An assembly on "salad bar etiquette" preceded the introduction of the salad bars, and student conduct has not been a problem.

Best Practice: Entrée bars

**Calaveras Unified School District, Calaveras County,
Ann Delara, 209.754.2122;
[http://www.calaveras.k12.ca.us/08 Departments/Food/fse.htm](http://www.calaveras.k12.ca.us/08_Departments/Food/fse.htm)**

Entrée bars, which allow students to pick and choose fruits, vegetables, baked potato toppings, and the like, are popular innovations that have succeeded, in many districts, in reducing waste and increasing participation. In Calaveras, elementary school students choose each day from 5 entrée selections, including a side-item steam bar which changes daily from salad bar to potato bar to taco bar to veggie bar. Middle schools feature entrée salads (chef, tuna, and taco) three times a week, and the high school has similar offerings. Since Calaveras campuses are closed and rural, and the district does not have many fast food restaurants or businesses near schools, Calaveras food service staff tries to keep student interest and participation through nutritious and appealing foods and a wide range of choices. Despite the many choices and the extra time needed to implement the program, costs have been kept low, and the program remains in the black. Daily NSLP participation has increased to 2000 meals (60%); students' and

teachers' opinions of the school food service program have changed for the better.

Two mornings a week, Ann teaches nutrition classes at all levels. She has held food shows at the elementary and secondary schools, bringing in vendors and allowing students to evaluate their foods. (Winners were added to the schools' menus.) Monthly newsletters include recipes – with nutrient analyses – to make at home.

Best Practice: Mini farmers' market

**Capistrano Unified School District, Orange County,
Dawn Davey, 949.489.7375; <http://www.cusdcampuscatering.com/>**

Capistrano USD has taken the entrée bar to another level by transforming the 5-A-Day fruit and vegetable bar – available to elementary students along with four daily choices of entrée – into a mini farmers' market. This event, at four of Capistrano's elementary schools, involves not only offering new fruit and vegetable choices, but also promotional activities like a visit from a dairy calf that students can pet as they learn about the importance of calcium in their diets.

Another innovative practice has been the use of the food service department website. Students can email the "Food Wiz" anonymously with menu planning suggestions and questions, resulting, according to department staff, in better menus, more honest communication between students and food service staff, and increased NSLP participation, especially by elementary students.

Best Practice: Farmers' Market Salad Bar

**Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, Los Angeles County,
Tracie Thomas, 310.450.8338 Ext 342, payton@smmusd.org;
<http://www.smmusd.org/depts/food/index.html>**

The Farmers' Market Salad Bar (FMSB) program in Santa Monica-Malibu USD offers students a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables purchased directly from local farmers. The program, which grew from a parent's suggestion, replaces ordinary salad bars with fresher, more appealing farmers' market produce. When a 1997 pilot at McKinley Elementary proved successful, the department implemented the program at all 15 schools, and the program has proven both popular and sustainable, with a FMSB lunch costing less than a hot entrée meal.

Students can take as much as they want and only what they want from FMSB, which eliminates waste. A fully reimbursable meal, the FMSB is kept fresh and interesting with the addition of a potato bar, pasta bar, or soup bar once a month: students who select the salad bar receive the hot entrée along with it. Salad bar participation doubles on these days. FMSB participation is boosted by the district's gardening program, operated by volunteers and paid staff, which maintains gardens at all school sites, conducts farm and market tours, and offers nutrition lessons. Started under a "Gardening Angel" program funded by the City of Santa Monica, the garden program links the garden to the cafeteria to the classroom for Santa Monica-Malibu students.

Supporting Food Service Through Nutrition Policies and Innovative Collaborations

Best Practice: Developing a district-wide food policy

Berkeley Unified School District, Alameda County
Erica Peng, Nutrition Network, 510.644.6710;
<http://www.berkeley.k12.ca.us/>

In 1999, Berkeley's school board approved a food policy that received notice for its efforts to "[e]nsure that the food served shall be organic to the maximum extent possible." With strong emphasis on the district's gardens program, and a goal of eliminating the reduced-price category, the policy – developed with input from parents, students, administrators, and community leaders – reflects a new understanding of the School Board's role and the schools' role in improving Berkeley students' nutrition.

The policy is still not fully implemented, and some parts of it may need to be revisited. For example, while the organic farmers' market salad bars at the elementary and middle schools were initially very popular and paid participation increased at the schools that have them, the program has turned out to be more expensive than anticipated when labor costs – for shopping at the farmers' markets, for example – are included. Similarly, the elimination of the reduced-price category is being revisited.

A Menu Advisory Committee consisting of parents, teachers, community and Board members, and administrative staff, met during the 2000-2001 school year to look at the policy and review the district's priorities. Students were involved in taste testing, and the Committee reviewed menus and discussed expansion of the school breakfast program to additional sites, contracts with local farmers for fresh and/or organic produce, and efforts at better communication with the Child Nutrition Services Program.

School gardening is key to Berkeley USD's food policy. Using USDA Food Stamp Nutrition Education Funds, Berkeley's Nutrition Network provides students at 11 schools with produce-tasting classes and gardens where they grow and harvest fruits

and vegetables. The garden activities are wide-ranging. They include cooking classes for children and parents; field trips to the weekly Farmers' Markets at which students are given a budget to buy healthy foods and then return to cook a meal; and farm field trips to learn about sustainable agriculture. A SHAPE grant supports staff development: food service staff are learning about organic farming and receiving cooking classes.

Best Practice: Encouraging student involvement in food services

**Herbert Hoover High School, San Diego County,
Naomi Butler, Food On The Run Site, Project Lean,
619.283.6281; <http://hoover.sdcs.k12.ca.us/index.html>**

Student members of Club LEAN (Leaders Encouraging Activity and Nutrition) at Herbert Hoover High School in San Diego meet every week and work to help the food service department advertise healthier items. Hoover has been part of the state's Project LEAN pilot program since 1996. Under the program, while fast food options are still available, Hoover students are aggressively offered healthier options as part of the regular meals and a la carte offerings. School administrators report that some of these healthier offerings sell well enough that – although they may still be more expensive than less nutritious items – the department can break even.

The active involvement of student food activists sets Hoover's program apart. At Hoover, where 100% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals, Club LEAN members have set up sampling booths for their peers, and then have marketed the more popular items. Their advertising campaigns have led to increased sales of Baja Bowls (Spanish rice with vegetables, black beans, and salsa), for example, and greater participation in the breakfast program overall. Students in Club LEAN have demonstrated the connections between marketing, economics, and nutrition education in student choices and advocated for policies that encourage greater availability of healthy foods.

Best Practice: Integrating nutrition into the curriculum

**El Monte City School District, Los Angeles County,
Wanda Grant, 626.453.3734;
http://www.emcsd.k12.ca.us/child_nutrition.html**

In El Monte, food service staff have created an outstanding partnership with teachers and administrators to integrate nutrition education into the K-8 curriculum. Related to the SAT9 and developed over 12 years by El Monte teachers in collaboration

with food services, the nutrition lessons are part of the core curriculum and can be accessed on the district website . The food service department purchased cooking carts for classroom demonstrations, and a library cart stocked with books that incorporate nutrition education in all school subjects. As part of a math lesson, for example, students determine the quantities of calcium or sugar in certain beverages. In history, students track the creation and popularity of the pretzel through medieval times or study the changes in U.S. milk distribution over the twentieth century. Wanda has been a leader in finding funding for this nutrition curriculum, and has 75 paid teachers involved. Retired teachers have been hired to organize and teach the lesson plans. Challenges include the large amount of paperwork necessary to create an audit trail and to organize the personnel service contracts with the teachers.

Best Practice: Eliminating candy and soda on campus

**Sequoia Middle School, Fresno Unified School District,
Fresno County, Principal Maureen Moore, 559.457.3210;
<http://www.fresno.k12.ca.us/schools/sequoia.html>**

At Sequoia Middle School in Fresno, a committed team of food service staff, school administration, faculty, parents and students have dramatically changed the school's orientation toward both meal programs and competitive foods over the last few years.

First, student and parent complaints about "maple bars for breakfast" led the school to cut back on 50% of the maple bars. When that worked, they cut out all of them, substituting hot, healthy breakfasts at the school. Recognizing that many of Sequoia's 850 students – 93% of whom qualify for free breakfast and lunch – did not eat after leaving school for the day, Sequoia added an After School Snack Program.

Other sources of sugar on campus were the vending machines and a snack bar, which support a principal's discretionary fund. Over time, the snack bar operator has agreed to provide foods with higher nutritional value and eliminate candy, while the vending machines have dropped soda and carry only waters and sports drinks. Surprisingly, the profits have exceeded those in the candy/soda days (with snack bar income doubling).

Finally, there are the fundraisers. Candy and soda sales had become a major source of funding for class activities, but the Principal, Maureen Moore, declared a temporary moratorium on these sales during a two-week standardized testing period, as an experiment in improving test scores. Jennifer Jordan, a physical

education teacher who had sold candy and soda after classes, offered her students healthy foods instead, and found that they were willing not only to eat, but to buy, these healthier alternatives, and the moratorium became permanent.

Sequoia's principal believes that as a result of the nutritional changes, there has been a decrease in behavior problems, and expulsions and suspensions have decreased at the school. She credits student ownership and participation in the process with making healthier eating part of the school culture.

This year, Sequoia has added a Food/Nutrition class. Sequoia has started this year with 6th graders on campus for the first time. The addition of 6th graders gave Sequoia the opportunity to add an elective. Foods/Nutrition seemed to be the best class to offer. The school reports that it is very excited about its next steps to increase nutrition education on campus. Now they feel they have a comprehensive program, teaching nutrition, selling nutritious snacks and eating nutritious breakfasts and lunches.

Also, Sequoia's Physical Education Department supports this program by engaging students in dialogue and activities about healthy bodies. Principal Moore feels extremely grateful to her students, parents, teachers, support staffs, district and community people who have helped Sequoia build a strong Healthy Choices culture at Sequoia.

Appendix

List of Participants

Joel Adema, *Chico Unified School District*
Amy Beckstrom, *Hawthorne School District*
Rod Blackner, *Paso Robles Joint Unified School District*
Naomi Butler, *Herbert Hoover High School*
Meg Chesley, *Corona-Norco Unified School District*
Dawn Davey, *Capistrano Unified School District*
Ann Delara, *Calaveras Unified School District*
Wanda Grant, *El Monte City School District*
Nancy May, *Healdsburg Unified School District*
Maureen Moore, *Sequoia Middle School, Fresno Unified School District*
Terry Pangborn, *Anaheim Union High School District*
Erica Peng, *Berkeley Unified School District*
Alajos Scheider, *Folsom Cordova Unified School District*
Howard Sonkin, *Carlsbad Unified School District*
Tracie Thomas, *Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District*
Suzanne Du Verrier, *Alisal Union School District*
Paula Weeks, *Tracy Unified School District*