

# **Bozeman High School | Food Service Survey**

**We're planning changes to the school food service operation at your school, and would like to know what you think of the current set up and what you would like us to do differently. Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions about lunchtime at school. Circle the number of the ONE response that best corresponds to your answer. Feel free to make additional comments at the end. PLEASE DO NOT IDENTIFY YOURSELF BY NAME ANYWHERE ON THIS SURVEY. Thanks!**

1. Your current grade level

- (1) 9<sup>th</sup>
- (2) 10<sup>th</sup>
- (3) 11<sup>th</sup>
- (4) 12<sup>th</sup>

2. Your sex (optional)

- (1) Female
- (2) Male

3. Please choose one:

- (1) I am currently eligible to receive a free or reduced price lunch and breakfast
- (2) I am not currently eligible to receive a free or reduced price lunch and breakfast
- (3) I don't know whether I'm currently eligible for free or reduced price lunch and breakfast

4. How many times a week, on average, do you do each of the following at lunchtime? Please circle one number on each line. (Note: Because you may get something from two or more of these sources on the same day, *the numbers don't necessarily have to add up to 5 times per week.*)

Buy something in the cafeteria	0	1	2	3	4	5
Bring food from home	0	1	2	3	4	5
Eat little or nothing at all	0	1	2	3	4	5
Eat something from a restaurant outside of school	0	1	2	3	4	5
Buy something from the DECA school store	0	1	2	3	4	5
Buy something from a vending machine at school	0	1	2	3	4	5

5. How many times a week, on average, do you stay at school during your lunch period without getting anything at all from the school cafeteria? Please circle one number.

0      1      2      3      4      5

6. How many times a week, on average, do you get in a car and go somewhere, as a passenger or driver, at lunchtime? Please circle one number.

0      1      2      3      4      5

7. In an average week, how often do you buy any drink from a vending machine at school?

- (1) I never buy drinks from vending machines at school
- (2) Infrequently – less than once a week on average
- (3) Sometimes – more than once a week, but not every day
- (4) Daily – about 5 times a week
- (5) Often – 6-10 purchases a week
- (6) Very frequently – more than 10 times a week

8. On an average day, how much do you spend on food and drink from all sources at lunchtime?

- (1) 0
- (2) 0 - \$0.50
- (3) \$0.50 - \$1.00
- (4) \$1.00 - \$2.00
- (5) \$2.00 - \$3.00
- (6) \$3.00 - \$4.00
- (7) \$4.00 - \$5.00
- (8) More than \$5.00

9. On an average day, how much do you spend on food and drink from the school cafeteria at lunchtime?
- |                     |                      |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| (1) 0               | (5) \$2.00 - \$3.00  |
| (2) 0 - \$0.50      | (6) \$3.00 - \$4.00  |
| (3) \$0.50 - \$1.00 | (7) \$4.00 - \$5.00  |
| (4) \$1.00 - \$2.00 | (8) More than \$5.00 |

10. Below, please PRINT CLEARLY the names of your three favorite places to eat for lunch outside of school:

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Please rate the food service staff at your school cafeteria on the service they provide.

11. Efficiency of the service:
- (1) Good
  - (2) Satisfactory
  - (3) Poor
  - (4) No opinion/I don't usually have any interaction with them
12. Friendliness and courtesy of the service:
- (1) Good
  - (2) Satisfactory
  - (3) Poor
  - (4) No opinion/I don't usually have any interaction with them
13. Does the cafeteria staff treat you with respect and make you feel like a valued customer?
- (1) Always
  - (2) Most of the time
  - (3) About half the time
  - (4) Rarely
  - (5) Never
  - (6) No opinion/I don't usually have any interaction with them
14. Do you usually know in advance what's available in the regular school lunch line before you get in line?
- (1) Yes, they do a good job of telling us what's on the menu so that we know before standing in line
  - (2) Sometimes we know and sometimes we don't
  - (3) No, it's not easy to find out what's available without standing in line to find out
  - (4) No opinion/Don't care
15. Do you ever find that cafeteria items are sold out or unavailable when you try to order them?
- (1) Yes, often – items I want and that are supposed to be available are frequently sold out or unavailable
  - (2) Yes, sometimes – once in awhile they don't have something I want
  - (3) Rarely/never – they almost always have what I want
  - (4) No opinion/Don't care
16. Which of these statements best describes your feelings about the line to get lunch at school?
- (1) I never or almost never eat school lunch, and the main reason is because I'd have to wait in line too long
  - (2) I sometimes don't eat school lunch because the wait in line is too long
  - (3) I usually don't get school lunch, but the wait in line isn't the main reason
  - (4) I usually do get the school lunch, and the line is usually not a problem
  - (5) I usually do get the school lunch, even though the wait in line takes too long
17. How long do you estimate that you stand in line in the cafeteria on an average day?
- (1) Less than 3 minutes
  - (2) 3-6 Minutes
  - (3) 6-10 Minutes
  - (4) More than 10 minutes
  - (5) I never go in the cafeteria

18. How important is quick service when you're deciding where to get your food for lunch?
- (1) Very important – quick service is usually the most important factor in my decision where to eat
  - (2) Fairly important – getting my food quickly is one of the main factors in my decision
  - (3) Not very important – I like to get my food quickly, but don't think about that when deciding
  - (4) Not important at all
  - (5) No opinion

Please rate the following environmental factors for the room where you eat lunch at school:

19. In terms of appearance—colorfulness, decorations, eye-appeal—how does the lunchroom look?
- (1) Good
  - (2) Satisfactory
  - (3) Poor
  - (4) No opinion
20. How is the noise level in the room?
- (1) Satisfactory
  - (2) Sometimes too loud
  - (3) Always too loud
  - (4) No opinion
21. In general, how does the lunchroom smell to you?
- (1) The room smells bad – it's not very conducive to enjoying a meal
  - (2) The room doesn't really smell good or bad – the smell doesn't affect my decision whether or not to eat there
  - (3) The aroma in the room is generally good
  - (4) No opinion
22. Do you have enough space to feel comfortable when you're eating?
- (1) Always
  - (2) Most of the time
  - (3) Sometimes
  - (4) Never
  - (5) No opinion
23. How would you rate the comfort level of the tables and chairs?
- (1) Good
  - (2) Satisfactory
  - (3) Poor
  - (4) No opinion
24. Which of the following would be your preferred seating arrangement for the cafeteria?
- (1) The current tables and chairs are fine
  - (2) Round tables with chairs, seating 4-8 students at each table
  - (3) Booths seating 4 students
  - (4) Mix of seating types, including booths and tables for different size groups
  - (5) No opinion
25. How clean is the eating area in your school cafeteria?
- (1) Very clean
  - (2) Satisfactory
  - (3) Somewhat messy
  - (4) Very messy
  - (5) No opinion
26. Do you ever notice the smell of bleach or cleaning products in the lunchroom when you're eating?
- (1) Always or just about always
  - (2) Often
  - (3) Sometimes
  - (4) Once in a great while
  - (5) No opinion

27. How clean is the serving area in your school cafeteria?
  - (1) Very clean
  - (2) Satisfactory
  - (3) Somewhat messy
  - (4) Very messy
  - (5) No opinion
  
28. Is the cafeteria conveniently located and easy to get in and out of at lunchtime for you?
  - (1) Location and convenience are not much of a problem – if I don't go into the cafeteria, it's not because of location
  - (2) Sometimes it's a hassle getting to the cafeteria, but not enough to keep me out of there
  - (3) The cafeteria is very inconvenient for me – I don't really have to go anywhere near it at lunchtime
  - (4) No opinion
  
29. If the cafeteria were open from 4 pm to 6 pm on school days, serving a variety of high-quality convenience foods (e.g., deep dish pizza, coffee drinks, hot dogs, Italian sausages, fresh fruit, popcorn, etc.) how often do you think you would purchase food during those hours?
  - (1) Daily
  - (2) Frequently
  - (3) Rarely
  - (4) Never

Please rate the following food quality factors for the food that is served in your cafeteria:

30. Overall, how would you rate the current quality of the food at the cafeteria?
  - (1) Good
  - (2) Satisfactory
  - (3) Poor
  - (4) No opinion
  
31. Taste – is the food flavorful enough?
  - (1) Food is usually too spicy
  - (2) Food is usually about right in terms of flavor and spiciness
  - (3) Food could generally use a little more flavor
  - (4) Food is almost always too bland
  - (5) No opinion
  
32. How would you rate the value of the cafeteria food (portion size and food quality for the price)?
  - (1) Good
  - (2) Satisfactory
  - (3) Poor
  - (4) No opinion
  
33. Would you be willing to pay more than the current school food prices for improved food quality and selection?
  - (1) Definitely willing to pay more
  - (2) Possibly willing to pay more
  - (3) Definitely not willing to pay more
  - (4) No opinion
  
34. Would you be willing to pay more for super-size portions, assuming improved food quality and selection?
  - (1) Definitely willing to pay more
  - (2) Possibly willing to pay more
  - (3) Definitely not willing to pay more
  - (4) No opinion

Would the following items or features cause you to choose food prepared at school more often (assuming that food quality was good)? Please circle one answer for each question.

35. Food-court style set-up modeled after the SUB at MSU, with five or six different stations serving different types of food
 

(1) Much more likely to choose school food	(3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
(2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food	(4) No opinion

36. Made-to-order deli and bagel sandwiches (like Subway or Safeway)
- (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
37. Self-service fresh fruit and salad bar with good quality produce, priced by the amount you serve yourself
- (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
38. Hot, fresh soup-of-the-day selections
- (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
39. Good-quality Chinese food available daily
- (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
40. Good-quality Mexican food available daily
- (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
41. Daily pasta selection with marinara, meat sauce, or other sauces
- (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
42. Restaurant-style deep-dish or personal pan pizza with various toppings, instead of rectangular school pizza
- (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
43. Fresh hot popcorn
- (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
44. Fresh hot pretzels and other high-quality snacks
- (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
45. Food carts at remote sites, like senior hall or outside the library, with items like coffee drinks, bagels, muffins, breakfast bars, bottled water, Gatorade, milk, etc. **CARTS WOULD BE OPEN THROUGHOUT THE DAY.**
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (1) Much more likely to choose school food     | (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food |
| (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food | (4) No opinion                                       |
46. Hot-dog carts at one or two school exits, so you could grab a hot dog, chips, and drink on your way out at lunchtime
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (1) Much more likely to choose school food     | (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food |
| (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food | (4) No opinion                                       |

47. Food available in the cafeteria throughout the day, including study hall (assuming better food quality)
  - (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
  
48. A wider selection of hot and cold breakfast items – like good quality fresh fruit, egg sandwiches on english muffins or bagels, fresh muffins, etc. – available in the cafeteria before school starts in the morning
  - (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
  
49. Special days, e.g., free drink with a meal on Mondays, two-for-one hot dogs on Tuesdays, 10<sup>th</sup> coffee drink free, etc.
  - (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
  
50. Promotional days, e.g., free movie tickets for ten winners, gift certificates for Hastings, etc.
  - (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion
  
51. Music programmed by a student DJ
  - (1) Much more likely to choose school food
  - (2) Somewhat more likely to choose school food
  - (3) I still would rarely or never choose school food
  - (4) No opinion

***Thanks again for helping us out! If you have any additional comments or suggestions, we'd love to hear them. Please write or print clearly in the space below.***

**Question #1**    **Your current grade level**

1 9th	422	30%
2 10th	371	26%
3 11th	322	23%
4 12th	286	20%
No answer	4	0.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1405</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Question #2**    **Your sex (optional)**

1 Female	646	46%
2 Male	730	52%
No answer	29	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1405</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Question #3**    **Please choose one:**

1 I am currently eligible to receive a free or reduced price lunch and breakfast	110	8%
2 I am not currently eligible to receive a free or reduced price lunch and breakfast	646	46%
3 I don't know whether I'm currently eligible for free or reduced price lunch and breakfast	622	44%
No answer	27	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1405</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Question #4**    **How many times a week, on average, do you do each of the following at lunchtime? Please circle one number on each line. (Note: Because you may get something from two or more of these sources on the same day, the numbers don't necessarily have to add up to 5 times per week.)**

	Never	Once	Twice	3 Times	4 Times	5 Times	Total
Buy something in the cafeteria	62%	15%	8%	6%	4%	5%	100%
Bring food from home	34%	12%	9%	10%	14%	21%	100%
Eat little or nothing at all	55%	20%	10%	7%	5%	3%	100%
Eat something from a restaurant outside of school	22%	26%	14%	12%	12%	13%	100%
Buy something from the DECA school store	42%	26%	14%	9%	5%	4%	100%
Buy something from a vending machine at school	34%	28%	16%	12%	4%	5%	100%

**Question #5** How many times a week, on average, do you stay at school during your lunch period without getting anything at all from the school cafeteria? Please circle one number.

0	392	28%
1	145	10%
2	123	9%
3	136	10%
4	232	17%
5	370	26%
No Answer	7	0.5%
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Total	1405	100%

**Question #6** How many times a week, on average, do you get in a car and go somewhere, as a passenger or driver, at lunchtime? Please circle one number.

0	708	50%
1	271	19%
2	124	9%
3	91	6%
4	74	5%
5	131	9%
No Answer	6	0.4%
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Total	1405	100%

**Question #7** In an average week, how often do you buy any drink from a vending machine at school?

1 I never buy drinks from vending machines at school	262	19%
2 Infrequently - less than once a week on average	486	35%
3 Sometimes - more than once a week, but not every day	468	33%
4 Daily - about 5 times a week	134	10%
5 Often - 6-10 purchases a week	29	2%
6 Very Frequently - more than 10 times a week	21	1%
No Answer	5	0.4%
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Total	1405	100%

**Question #8** On an average day, how much do you spend on food and drink from all sources at lunchtime?

1 0	157	11%
2 0 - \$0.50	86	6%
3 \$0.50 - \$1.00	158	11%
4 \$1.00 - \$2.00	284	20%
5 \$2.00 - \$3.00	344	24%
6 \$3.00 - \$4.00	188	13%
7 \$4.00 - \$5.00	126	9%
8 More than \$5.00	55	4%
No Answer	7	0.5%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #9** On an average day, how much do you spend on food and drink from the school cafeteria at lunchtime?

1 0	862	61%
2 0 - \$0.50	114	8%
3 \$0.50 - \$1.00	117	8%
4 \$1.00 - \$2.00	157	11%
5 \$2.00 - \$3.00	89	6%
6 \$3.00 - \$4.00	25	2%
7 \$4.00 - \$5.00	13	1%
8 More than \$5.00	7	0.5%
No Answer	21	1%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #10** Below, please **PRINT CLEARLY** the names of you three favorite places to eat for lunch outside of school

*These total numbers of mentions for all restaurants cited by respondents are tabulated on the page immediately following the answers to question #51*

**Question #11 Please rate the food service staff at your school cafeteria on the efficiency of service they provide:**

1 Good	332	24%
2 Satisfactory	300	21%
3 Poor	78	6%
4 No opinion/I don't usually have any interaction with them	684	49%
No Answer	11	1%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #12 Please rate the food service staff at your school cafeteria on the friendliness and courtesy of service they provide:**

1 Good	412	29%
2 Satisfactory	268	19%
3 Poor	71	5%
4 No opinion/I don't usually have any interaction with them	645	46%
No Answer	9	1%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #13 Does the cafeteria staff treat you with respect and make you feel like a valued customer?**

1 Always	205	15%
2 Most of the time	314	22%
3 About half the time	100	7%
4 Rarely	76	5%
5 Never	26	2%
6 No opinion/I don't usually have any interaction with them	672	48%
No Answer	12	1%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #14 Do you usually know in advance what's available in the regular school lunch line before you get in line?**

1 Yes, they do a good job of telling us what's on the menu so that we know before standing in line	139	10%
2 Sometimes we know and sometimes we don't	183	13%
3 No, it's not easy to find out what's available without standing in line to find out	252	18%
4 No opinion/don't care	817	58%
No Answer	14	1%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #15 Do you ever find that cafeteria items are sold out or unavailable when you try to order them?**

1 Yes, often - items I want and that are suppose to be available are frequently sold out or unavailable	165	12%
2 Yes, sometimes - once in awhile they don't have something I want	331	24%
3 Rarely/never - they almost always have what I want	122	9%
4 No opinion/don't care	775	55%
No Answer	12	1%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #16 Which of these statements best describes your feelings about the line to get lunch at school?**

1 I never or almost never eat school lunch, and the main reason is because I'd have to wait in line too long	312	22%
2 I sometimes don't eat school lunch because the wait in line is too long	130	9%
3 I usually don't get school lunch, but the wait in line isn't the main reason	676	48%
4 I usually do get school lunch, and the line is usually not a problem	128	9%
5 I usually do get school lunch, even though the wait in line takes too long	106	8%
No Answer	53	4%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #17 How long do you estimate that you stand in line in the cafeteria on an average day?**

1 Less than 3 minutes	177	13%
2 3-6 minutes	314	22%
3 6-10 minutes	82	6%
4 More than 10 minutes	31	2%
5 I never go in the cafeteria	784	56%
No Answer	17	1%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #18 How important is quick service when you're deciding where to get your food for lunch?**

1 Very important - quick service is usually the most important factor in my decision where to eat	320	23%
2 Fairly important - getting my food quickly is one of the main factors in my decision	485	35%
3 Not very important - I like to get my food quickly, but don't think about that when deciding	244	17%
4 Not important at all	46	3%
5 No opinion	293	21%
No Answer	17	1%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #19 In terms of appearance - colorfulness, decorations, eye-appeal - how does the lunchroom look?**

1 Good	69	5%
2 Satisfactory	338	24%
3 Poor	662	47%
4 No opinion	317	23%
No Answer	19	1%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #20 How is the noise level in the room?**

1 Satisfactory	413	29%
2 Sometimes too loud	338	24%
3 Always too loud	190	14%
4 No opinion	446	32%
No Answer	18	1%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #21 In general, how does the lunchroom smell to you?**

1 The room smells bad - it's not very conducive to enjoying a meal	312	22%
2 The room doesn't really smell good or bad - the smell doesn't affect my decision whether or not to eat there	547	39%
3 The aroma in the room is generally good	51	4%
4 No opinion	478	34%
No Answer	17	1%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #22 Do you have enough space to feel comfortable when you're eating?**

1 Always	163	12%
2 Most of the time	341	24%
3 Sometimes	274	20%
4 Never	93	7%
5 No opinion	520	37%
No Answer	14	1%
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Total	1405	100%

**Question #23 How would you rate the comfort level of the tables and chairs?**

1 Good	69	5%
2 Satisfactory	386	27%
3 Poor	588	42%
4 No opinion	346	25%
No Answer	16	1%
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Total	1405	100%

**Question #24 Which of the following would be your preferred seating arrangement for the cafeteria?**

1 The current tables and chairs are fine	153	11%
2 Round tables with chairs, seating 4-8 students at each table	118	8%
3 Booths seating 4 students	80	6%
4 Mix of seating types, including booths and tables for different size groups	604	43%
5 No opinion	429	31%
No Answer	21	1%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #25 How clean is the eating area in your school cafeteria?**

1 Very clean	55	4%
2 Satisfactory	424	30%
3 Somewhat messy	429	31%
4 Very messy	103	7%
5 No opinion	375	27%
No Answer	19	1%
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Total	1405	100%

**Question #26 Do you ever notice the smell of bleach or cleaning products in the lunchroom when you are eating?**

1 Always or just about always	144	10%
2 Often	156	11%
3 Sometimes	328	23%
4 Once in a great while	241	17%
5 No opinion	521	37%
No Answer	15	1%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #27 How clean is the serving area in your school cafeteria?**

1 Very clean	118	8%
2 Satisfactory	494	35%
3 Somewhat messy	150	11%
4 Very messy	47	3%
5 No opinion	571	41%
No Answer	25	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #28 Is the cafeteria conveniently located and easy to get in and out of at lunchtime for you?**

1 Location and convenience are not much of a problem - if I don't go in the cafeteria, it's not because of location	523	37%
2 Sometimes it's a hassle getting to the cafeteria, but not enough to keep me out of there	241	17%
3 The cafeteria is very inconvenient for me - I don't really have to go anywhere near it at	79	6%
4 No opinion	531	38%
No Answer	31	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #29** If the cafeteria were open from 4 pm to 6 pm on school days, serving a variety of high-quality convenience foods (e.g. deep dish pizza, coffee drinks, hot dogs, Italian sausages, fresh fruit, popcorn, etc.) how often do you think you would purchase food during those hours?

1 Daily	99	7%
2 Frequently	348	25%
3 Rarely	503	36%
4 Never	424	30%
No Answer	31	2%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #30** Overall, how would you rate the current quality of the food at the cafeteria?

1 Good	67	5%
2 Satisfactory	396	28%
3 Poor	380	27%
4 No opinion	531	38%
No Answer	31	2%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #31** Taste - is the food flavorful enough?

1 Food is usually too spicy	23	2%
2 Food is usually about right in terms of flavor and spiciness	156	11%
3 Food could generally use a little more flavor	299	21%
4 Food is almost always too bland	201	14%
5 No opinion	694	49%
No Answer	32	2%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #32** How would you rate the value of the cafeteria food (portion size and food quality for the price)?

1 Good	140	10%
2 Satisfactory	363	26%
3 Poor	250	18%
4 No opinion	620	44%
No Answer	32	2%
Total	1405	100%

**Question #33 Would you be willing to pay more than the current school food prices for improved food quality and selection?**

1 Definitely willing to pay more	122	9%
2 Possibly willing to pay more	433	31%
3 Definitely not willing to pay more	256	18%
4 No opinion	565	40%
No Answer	29	2%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #34 Would you be willing to pay more for super-size portions, assuming improved food quality and selection?**

1 Definitely willing to pay more	141	10%
2 Possibly willing to pay more	467	33%
3 Definitely not willing to pay more	148	11%
4 No opinion	621	44%
No Answer	28	2%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #35 Food-court style set-up modeled after the SUB at MSU, with five or six different stations serving different types of food**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	651	46%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	322	23%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	152	11%
4 No opinion	241	17%
No Answer	39	3%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #36 Made-to-order deli and bagel sandwiches (like Subway or Safeway)**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	555	40%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	378	27%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	191	14%
4 No opinion	248	18%
No Answer	33	2%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #37 Self-service fresh fruit and salad bar with good quality produce, priced by the amount you serve yourself**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	470	33%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	382	27%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	206	15%
4 No opinion	315	22%
No Answer	32	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #38 Hot, fresh soup-of the-day selections**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	370	26%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	407	29%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	268	19%
4 No opinion	327	23%
No Answer	33	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #39 Good-quality Chinese food available daily**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	473	34%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	332	24%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	260	19%
4 No opinion	304	22%
No Answer	36	3%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #40 Good-quality Mexican food available daily**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	476	34%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	383	27%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	224	16%
4 No opinion	291	21%
No Answer	31	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #41 Daily pasta selection with marinara, meat sauce, or other sauces**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	451	32%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	392	28%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	236	17%
4 No opinion	293	21%
No Answer	33	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #42 Restaurant-style deep-dish or personal pan pizza with various toppings, instead of rectangular**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	615	44%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	330	23%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	173	12%
4 No opinion	254	18%
No Answer	33	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #43 Fresh hot popcorn**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	274	20%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	343	24%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	368	26%
4 No opinion	387	28%
No Answer	33	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #44 Fresh hot pretzels and other high quality snacks**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	398	28%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	372	26%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	280	20%
4 No opinion	322	23%
No Answer	33	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #45 Food carts at remote sites, like senior hall or outside the library, with items like coffee drinks, bagels, muffins, breakfast bars, bottled water, Gatorade, milk, etc. CARTS WOULD BE OPEN THROUGHOUT THE DAY.**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	723	51%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	320	23%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	102	7%
4 No opinion	223	16%
No Answer	37	3%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #46 Hot-dog carts at one or two school exits, so you could grab a hot dog, chips, and drink on your way out at lunchtime**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	332	24%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	353	25%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	319	23%
4 No opinion	363	26%
No Answer	38	3%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #47 Food available in the cafeteria throughout the day, including study hall(assuming better food quality)**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	443	32%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	448	32%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	207	15%
4 No opinion	277	20%
No Answer	30	2%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #48 A wider selection of hot and cold breakfast items - like good quality fresh fruit, egg sandwiches on english muffins or bagels, fresh muffins, etc. - available in the cafeteria before school starts in the morning**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	400	28%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	317	23%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	290	21%
4 No opinion	368	26%
No Answer	30	2%
Total		1405 100%

**Question #49 Special days, e.g., free drink with a meal on Mondays, two-for-one hot dogs on Tuesdays, 10th coffee drink free, etc.**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	531	38%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	348	25%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	224	16%
4 No opinion	272	19%
No Answer	30	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	1

**Question #50 Promotional days, e.g., free movie tickets for ten winners, gift certificates for Hastings, etc.**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	619	44%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	320	23%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	178	13%
4 No opinion	257	18%
No Answer	31	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

**Question #51 Music programmed by a student DJ**

1 Much more likely to choose school food	428	30%
2 Somewhat more likely to choose school food	296	21%
3 I still would rarely or never choose school food	291	21%
4 No opinion	355	25%
No Answer	35	2%
<hr/>		
Total	1405	100%

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## CASE STUDY

### *Knowledge Is Power—A Marketing Case Study*

John Bennett, MA

#### BACKGROUND

Kids weren't eating at Bozeman High, and Bob Burrows wanted to know why. Burrows is in charge of child nutrition for the Bozeman, Montana, School District, so of course, he had some pretty good hunches—what the employees told him, what he'd picked up from kids, what he could surmise from his own experience. But he didn't want to act on hunches. He wanted to be sure. He wanted *knowledge*, not guesses.

So, in the spring of 2002, Burrows asked John Bennett Creative Services for Child Nutrition Professionals Inc. (JBCS) to conduct research among the students at Bozeman High. Burrows knew that JBCS had developed a number of market research projects for other child nutrition programs in the United States, so he charged JBCS to find out exactly why his students chose (or, more often, *did not choose*) products from his high school cafeteria and to devise strategies for encouraging more kids to make that choice more often.

#### CHALLENGE

The state of the high school's food service program at the time made such a project necessary. For some years previous, Burrows had worked to improve product, service, and customer satisfaction at Bozeman's elementary and middle school facilities, and had succeeded admirably. Those schools were (and are) in sound financial shape and serve large numbers of their students. Now, Burrows was ready to turn his attention to the high school, which, owing to many circumstances, wasn't nearly as successful.

Bozeman High has an open campus for all students. It is surrounded by fast-food and other lunch alternatives within easy walking distance. In the spring of 2002, total revenue from the school's cafeteria averaged around \$600 a day—a “check average” of less than 35 cents a day for each of Bozeman High's 1,800 or so students, in a school system with very low numbers of students eligible for free meals.

Of course, Burrows had his own notions for why so few students ate in his facilities. Beyond the obvious apparent culprits (open campus and multiple nearby commercial alternatives), he had several other ideas.

First, Burrows cited the rambling, multi-wing layout of the high school. Although the entrance to the cafeteria is located directly across the hall from the main entrance to the school, there are many other places where students can enter and leave the building. Perhaps this meant that a lot of students never even went anywhere near the cafeteria when they left for lunch. Thus, *accessibility* might be a problem.

Also, Burrows had a hunch that a fairly predictable participation pattern seen in most high schools might not hold true at Bozeman High. In virtually every other high school JBCS has studied, student participation and spending fall off from grade to grade among high school students; invariably, 10th graders participate less than 9th graders, 11th graders less than 10th graders, and 12th graders participate least of all, sometimes dramatically so. Burrows suspected this pattern might not hold for Bozeman High. He thought we'd find that 9th graders were so determined to take advantage of the right to leave

school for lunch that they would participate less than older students, for whom the novelty of leaving school for lunch (and paying much more outside) would probably have worn off.

Burrows also believed that JBCS would find that the cafeteria's old serving areas and utter lack of restaurant-like ambience in the lunchroom eating area further held down sales and participation. As well, he suspected that food quality and choices (or the lack of same) were also implicated in low student use of the food service program at Bozeman High.

Finally, Burrows believed that there were many missed opportunities in the traditional way that many high school food service programs, like Bozeman High's, serve their customers. Students at Bozeman High, like students in most American high schools, can get breakfast and lunch during set time periods. Burrows anticipated that students would spend more money, patronize the school nutrition program more, and stay on campus more often if the Bozeman High program operated more like a college feeding program. He theorized that by providing more product choices, in more venues, at more times of the day, more students would patronize the program for convenience and variety—not just because at 11:30 every morning they were expected to get in line.

JBCS's research would test all of these assumptions, finding some more or less right and others more or less wrong, and also create some other knowledge about Bozeman High's customers that they had little or no prior inkling about.

### **ACTION**

JBCS worked closely with Bob Burrows throughout the research process, which began with extensive phone calls and e-mail correspondence before it visited Bozeman

High for the first time. Research at Bozeman began with interviewing Burrows to gain the benefit of his expertise and obtain his input. This was followed by 2 days speaking with Burrows and the three-person food service staff, touring the facility with him, and then observing students' lunch-time practices and traffic patterns in the cafeteria, elsewhere in the building, outside on campus, and in many of the fast-food and other food outlets in the surrounding area. Because focus group participants cited the food service in the Student Union Building of Montana State University in Bozeman as a desirable model for an ideal high school food service, JBCS visited that location as well.

Based on these observations and conversations with Burrows, JBCS created a moderator's guide for our focus group sessions, which were conducted over 2 days in May 2002. (Please note that this brief discussion will not go into detail about the nuts and bolts of conducting market research; i.e., recruiting participants, creating the moderator's guide, using the focus group results to help create the survey, etc. Readers interested in more examples, details, and instructions can find these on the JBCS website at <http://www.schoolmealsmarketing.com>.)

The five focus groups (which were videotaped) averaged 10 to 12 participants and 60 to 75 minutes in length. Separate groups were held for each of the four high school grades, and a fifth group contained students from various grades who reported that they ate relatively frequently at the cafeteria. After returning from Bozeman, JBCS turned those 5-plus hours of sessions into videotapes, DVDs, and transcripts.

Based on the information gleaned from the focus groups, as well as further consultation with Bob Burrows, JBCS then developed a 51-question survey, which was

administered to students in all grades in late winter 2003. Again, JBCS provided Burrows with explicit instructions for administering the surveys, along with instruction memos for the school administrators, the teachers who would be administering the survey, and the student respondents. Out of a student population of about 1,800, 1,405 surveys were completed and tallied. (Again, the full survey results can be found at <http://www.schoolmealsmarketing.com>.)

Based on the whole large body of this research—Burrows’s observations, JBCS’s observations, the focus groups, and the surveys—JBCS created a series of recommendations for immediately improving participation at Bozeman High, which included:

1. Begin to create a college eatery atmosphere (like the SUB at Montana State) with food court stations to include, at the outset, made-to-order subs, pizza, and fresh fruit and salad bar. Emphasize control and choice for the customers.
  2. Substantially improve food quality.
  3. Expand hours and product offerings on both ends of the day.
  4. Create remote selling sites.
  5. Commit to a new model of service and management for the high school.
  6. Increase staffing.
  7. Pay attention to marketing—signage, branding, promotion, couponing.
  8. Raise prices slightly, both to pay for some of the initial cost of the changes and to reinforce the perception that the food is different and therefore worth more.
2. Address severe environmental and ambience problems (which would require substantial remodeling or, better yet, rebuilding the entire facility from the ground up).
  3. Add more stations to food court concept.

Accordingly, for the beginning of school in September 2003, Burrows and his staff implemented many of these changes. Additional staffing was the prerequisite for making many of these recommendations work, so the staff was initially doubled, from three to six employees. More employees would be added later as the project ramped-up.

One of these additional employees became the manager of a new remote food service area—a large, permanent refrigerated cart at the far end of the sprawling school that served salads, sandwiches, water, sports drinks, fresh fruit, and other items, not just at lunch time, but throughout the morning and afternoon.

The three new food court concepts were put into place, with signage and names created by JBCS—“Fresh on Main” for made-to-order deli style sandwiches, “Montana Slices” for fresh-baked pizza, and “Bridger Bowls” for the new salad bar.

The perception of food quality was enhanced by several strategies, including:

- The installation and use of a conveyor pizza oven for pizza and other items like fresh-baked pretzels, which had the added advantage of greatly enhancing the aroma in the facility.
- The daily delivery of fresh produce for the salad bar.
- Allowing the students to choose some sandwich ingredients and to see the sandwiches being made.

Additionally, JBCS recommended several longer-term improvements, including:

1. Take over all clean-up responsibilities from the custodial staff.

- Introduction of new items, such as the “Grilled Three-Cheese Sandwich.”

Prices were raised slightly. However, this helped increase business by buttressing the perception that the food was better and therefore worth the additional cost.

The cafeteria, which doubled as the school’s study hall, no longer opened only for breakfast and lunch, but was in operation throughout the school day—and beyond, for the many customers who were still in the building or on the grounds after school, for clubs, sports, and myriad other reasons. Simultaneously, the model of service changed from “nobody’s in line so let’s shut down a little early” to “let’s make it as easy as possible for kids to get delicious, healthy food any time and all over the school, not just in the cafeteria, and not just for an hour a day.” Other changes, like the complete remodeling, have had to be deferred as the district debates building a new high school.

### OUTCOME AND NEXT STEPS

The results were dramatic. At the beginning of the new school year, 3 months after the unveiling of the new look—and attitude—sales had increased to \$1,000 a day. By a year later, sales at the remote cart had tripled, fresh pizzas sold daily had gone from 8 to 22, and the single-day record for reimbursable meals was broken in September 2004, normally a slow month. By 2005, overall sales were exceeding \$2,000 a day, with plenty of room for further growth and many changes already planned. For instance, as sales continued to grow, yet more

employees would be needed to maintain the commitment to customer service that was so crucial for the turnaround. Also, the environmental problems noted earlier will have to be more significantly ameliorated to keep the momentum in perception-change moving forward. Additionally, more food court concepts and remote serving areas coming on line gradually over the next few years will build and maintain customer interest.

### CONCLUSION

The market research project served as the catalyst for this remarkable turnaround. With the results of the project in hand, Bob Burrows was no longer flying blind. He could, with great confidence, put changes into effect that he *knew* his customers wanted, thereby maximizing his resources, and increasing the likelihood of success for his project.

You can’t change your customers’ behavior until you know what they want, and you can’t know what they want until you ask them. Knowledge truly is power for a child nutrition program director who wants to make changes, but isn’t sure where to start.

### APPLICATION

1. What were the major strengths of this approach to increasing participation in the high school?
2. If you confronted a similar situation, what strategies used in this case would you apply?
3. Discuss the importance of conducting research before launching a major change in the program.

# **J**ohn Bennett Creative Services *for Child Nutrition Professionals*

***Below are some talking points you can use if you are asked by local media or other groups to comment on the beef recall situation. Look these points over carefully, and revise to fit your situation or call us for a revision, or further help.***

***Keep in mind that it is always acceptable, when a reporter calls, to tell him or her that you are taking care of something right now and to please give you a number to call back in just a few minutes. Then, gather your thoughts and composure, look over the talking points again, and call back promptly.***

***It's also acceptable to use the talking points when addressing the media as a group or individually. Get to know the material and try not to simply read, but use the points to refer to and keep yourself on track.***

***Finally, don't feel pressured to say more than you know or can accurately say. Stay "on message" and stick to the points below, even if you have to repeat key phrases, and resist the all-too-human urge to blather on. Say what you have to say and then stop – it's up to them to frame a new question, so don't let them use "the roaring silence" to get you to keep going kind of aimlessly.***

***Try to come off as accommodating and eager to help, rather than defensive or trying to hide something.***

***AND PLEASE – call or contact us if you need more extensive or specific help or preparation.***

### ***Talking points:***

1. Let me first say that our primary commitment is always to the ***health and well-being of the children in our school system.***
2. **We did receive some of the beef in question** and have withdrawn all of it from our supplies. I want to stress that none of the recalled beef has been found to be harmful or tainted in any way. And I want to assure everyone in our community that we have always been and will always be vigilant, ***even obsessive,*** about the safety of the food we serve to kids. We follow the strictest food safety standards and in the very rare event that we need to address a problem, we do so quickly and openly, as we have done here. Again, nothing is more important than the health and well-being of our kids.
3. USDA recalled the beef because of serious violations of ***procedures*** by the processor in question. Like all Americans, we are distressed and upset about the revelations regarding this processor. The recall is what USDA calls a “Class Two” recall, meaning that none of the product has been found to be even potentially harmful.
4. We get most of our food from commercial processors, many of whom are local. Food from the USDA commodity program makes up only about XX% of the food we prepare and serve in our program, and we count on USDA to monitor the processors of that food and to act when problems are found. I think this recall shows that USDA is ready to act decisively, and we commend them for taking this sweeping action.
5. Again, I want to stress that nothing – ***NOTHING*** – matters more to us than the health and well-being of our children. We’re here to provide the nutrition kids need to learn well, and whenever a question about food safety comes up, we will always act ***immediately*** in the best interest of our kids.

***NOTE: Be prepared to say how much product you received/withdrew. You may well get a specific question along those lines.***

# **J**ohn Bennett Creative Services *for Child Nutrition Professionals*

***Attached are two versions of a press release for the beef recall situation. One version is for districts that did not get any of the recalled beef, and the other is for districts that have had to pull some supplies.***

***Even more so than the parent letter or talking points, this release will require you to edit carefully to insert your own specific information!***

***Nearly all press releases these days are emailed rather than mailed or faxed. If you like, we will email you the press release text in the body of an email, and you can edit it and forward it. This would save you the step of getting the press release text into an email in good form. That can be a hassle. We will even make your changes for you and then send you the text in the body of an email for you to simply forward.***

***If you do send out the release, be prepared for a follow-up call from a reporter. See our "media talking points" piece for important advice regarding this possibility.***

***Call or email if you have questions or need help.***

***AND PLEASE – call or contact us if you need more extensive or specific help or preparation.***

## ***News Release***

For immediate release: February 28, 2008

Contact: Lee Hocker, 717-657-5108 or LHocker@hannasd.org

### **How beef recall affects Susquehanna Township School District**

*Harrisburg, Feb. 28, 2008* – Susquehanna Township School District has removed XX cases of beef from its supplies to comply with the recent recall instituted by USDA, according to Lee Ann Hocker, Food Services Director for the district.

Hocker said that she has gone a step further by putting all beef the district received from USDA on hold, no matter where the beef originated. “Until we’re certain that it’s not part of the recall, we will not prepare any meals using any of the beef we have on hand that we received through USDA,” Hocker said.

Hocker said that her department’s primary commitment is always to the health and well-being of the children in STSD schools. “We prepare and serve XX meals a day, XX a year, which makes us one of the biggest food service operations in the area,” she said, “but we try to never lose sight of the fact that every single one of those meals is eaten by one of our children. Food safety and cleanliness are our most important responsibilities.”

Beef was recalled nationwide in mid-February after Westland/Hallmark, a major west-coast processor of beef for the USDA commodity program, was found to have committed serious violations of processing procedures. In addition to some school meals programs, commercial food vendors like General Mills and Nestle have also been affected by the recall. The action is what USDA calls a “class two” recall, meaning that none of the beef in question has been found to be tainted or harmful in any way. USDA says the risk of human illness from eating the beef is remote.

Hocker said that food from the USDA commodity program makes up only about XX% of the food prepared and served in the district. “We count on USDA to monitor the processors of that food and to act when problems are found,” Hocker said. “I think this recall shows that USDA is ready to act decisively, and we commend them for taking this sweeping action.”

Hocker said that her department follows the strictest food safety standards. “In the very rare event that we need to address a problem, we do so quickly and openly, as we have in this case” she said. “We’re here to provide the nutrition kids need to learn well, and whenever a question about food safety comes up, we will always act immediately in the best interest of our kids.”

## ***Use this letter if you did receive some of the beef***

Dear Parent:

You may have heard that a large amount of beef was recently recalled by USDA and that some of that beef was processed for school systems to use in the National School Lunch Program..

We did receive some of the beef in question and withdrew all of it from our supplies immediately upon being informed of the recall. USDA recalled the beef because of serious violations of procedures by the processor in question. The recall is what USDA calls a “Class Two” recall, meaning that none of the product has been found to be even potentially harmful.

Our primary commitment is always to the health and well-being of the children in our schools. We prepare and serve XX meals a day, XX a year, which makes us one of the biggest food service operations in the area -- but we never lose sight of the fact that every single one of those meals is eaten by one of our children. Food safety and cleanliness are our most important responsibilities.

I want to assure everyone in our community that we have always been and will always be vigilant, even *obsessive*, about the safety of the food we serve to kids. We follow the strictest food safety standards and in the very rare event that we need to address a problem, we do so quickly and openly, as we have done here. I want to stress that none of the recalled beef has been found to be harmful or tainted in any way.

We get most of our food from commercial processors, many of whom are local. Food from the USDA commodity program makes up only about XX% of the food we prepare and serve in our program, and we count on USDA to monitor the processors of that food and to act when problems are found. I think this recall shows that USDA is ready to act decisively, and we commend them for taking this sweeping action.

Again, I want to stress that nothing – NOTHING – matters more to us than the health and well-being of our children. We’re here to provide the nutrition kids need to learn well, and whenever a question about food safety comes up, we will always act immediately in the best interest of our kids.

Finally, I want to encourage you to contact me directly at (phone number) or (email) with any questions or concerns about this matter or any other child nutrition-related issue.

Thank you,

Name

Title

School system name

# Our commitment to food safety is absolute.

You may have heard about the recent USDA recall of beef, some of which was distributed to school systems. We did receive some of the beef in question and withdrew all of it from our supplies immediately upon being informed of the recall. USDA recalled the beef because of serious violations of procedures by the processor. None of the recalled product has been found to be even potentially harmful.

Our primary commitment is always to the health and well-being of the children in our schools. We prepare and serve thousands of meals every day, but we never lose sight of the fact that every single one of those meals is eaten by one of our children. That's why we follow the strictest food safety standards, and in the very rare event that we need to address a problem, we do so quickly and openly, as we did in this case.

We're here to provide the nutrition kids need to learn well, and whenever a question about food safety comes up, we will always act immediately in the best interest of our kids. That's our commitment to you and your family.

**School Meals**  
*We serve education every day™*

*Valley City Public Schools Nutrition Services*

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**School Meals**  
*We serve education every day™*

*Valley City Public Schools Nutrition Services*

# ***News Alert***

**For more information:**  
Pat Brooks, 573-214-3480

**For immediate release:**  
Thursday, March 2, 2006

## **CPS salad bars going “MEGA” for National Nutrition Month**

**(Columbia, Mo – March 2, 2006)** – A bounty of kiwi fruit, fresh broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, and spring mix lettuce will transform Columbia Public Schools’ salad bars into “Mega Salad Bars” to celebrate National Nutrition Month in March.

“Good nutrition habits are formed for a lifetime when kids are young, and we want to reinforce the good habits kids learn at home by providing fresh, healthy, and eye-appealing choices on our salad bars,” said Pat Brooks, Director of Columbia Schools’ Nutrition Services Department.

Salad bars have been a fixture at Columbia’s 28 school cafeterias for 16 years, but Brooks, a registered dietitian, expects that the new “Mega” offerings will improve the draw of the salad bar *and* the health of Columbia’s students. “The latest thinking in the science of nutrition is kind of a ‘back to the future’ thing, lots of whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables,” Brooks said. “We want to give our customers as much of the best stuff as possible. We already serve only 100% whole wheat bread. This is another

step in that direction.”

Brooks said that the new offerings were made possible in part by a unique partnership between her program and the Department of Defense. CPS Nutrition Services applied for and received a grant that enables the program to use a portion of its regular federal commodity money to buy fresh produce from small distributors certified by DOD. The grant totals \$47,000 for this year. All produce purchased under the grant must be American grown – and kiwis, as it happens, are in season now in California. The same program made possible the department’s “Fresh Pear Extravaganza” in February.

School nutrition programs like Columbia’s have to continually look for creative ways to make ends meet while providing high-quality nutrition, Brooks said. “Our primary role is to serve education by making sure kids get the good nutrition they need to learn well,” she said. “But it’s a daily balancing act – serving 11,000 meals a day, giving our customers options that *they* want to choose, trying to entice them to the healthy choices – all while having to pay our own way without any direct support from the district.

“Having fresh, beautiful, colorful, delicious produce to attract kids makes that task just a little bit easier.”

Brooks said that the Mega Salad Bar concept will continue beyond National Nutrition Month, as long as the customers go for it and good, affordable fresh produce is available.

# # #

## Maximizing the school salad bar

**Thanks to federal money, a wider assortment of fresh produce is showing up in school cafeterias**

By **RACHEL KELLY**

March 7, 2006

With a cornucopia of new options including fresh cauliflower, broccoli and kiwi, regular salad bars in the Columbia Public Schools have been upgraded to “mega salad bars.” The mega bars, paid for with federal grant money, have been opened at the schools as part of March’s National Nutrition Month. Salad bars have been a part of the district’s 28 cafeterias for years, but the revamped bars go beyond lettuce, carrots and tomatoes.

Pat Brooks, director of Columbia Public Schools’ nutrition services department, said the main purpose of the mega bars is to expose children to foods they might not have tasted before.

“Some of our students have had limited experience with fresh fruits and vegetables,” Brooks said. “You need to have positive reinforcement.”

The salad bars also help students get the recommended goal of five servings of fruits and vegetables each day, Brooks said. “We want to improve the health of students so that they’re ready to learn,” she said.

Elaine Hassemer, principal of Paxton Keeley Elementary School, said the new salad bars fit in well with the school’s health curriculum, which teaches healthy eating patterns.

“I think that the more they’re exposed to nutritious choices, the more likely they are to make healthy choices,” said Kristine Smith, whose two boys eat school lunches daily at Russell Boulevard Elementary School.

Suzanne Sullivan, Paxton Keeley Elementary’s kitchen manager, said the mega bars are a good alternative to some of the unhealthy options children are used to having for lunch, in particular fried foods.

“We basically are in competition with fast-food restaurants,” she said.

Though Paxton Keeley has long had a salad bar as a lunchtime option, Sullivan said she is noticing more interest in it.

“New items have been disappearing,” she said, naming broccoli and cucumbers as some of the most popular additions. Other new salad fixings include fresh pears, radishes, green peppers and celery sticks.

Hassemer said the program has been received positively so far at Paxton Keeley.

“Obviously, it’s very appealing to kids and adults,” she said, adding that fresh fruit has been popular with the students.

The mega bars have been made possible through a \$47,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Defense and administered by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to go for fruits and vegetables for the year. Some of the money is being used to buy produce for the salad bars, although the grant requires that everything is grown in the United States.

Brooks said she would like the mega bars to continue as long as the grant money lasts; she hopes to add fresh strawberries to the cafeterias in April.

Nutrition services had previously added other healthy options to cafeterias food — for example, offering 100 percent whole wheat bread and sweet potatoes.

“We are very conscious of what we’re serving,” Brooks said. “We really have a good assortment.”

## **OFFERING HEALTHIER OPTIONS**

**The Columbia Public Schools** are adding new kinds of foods to their salad bars, making them into mega bars. Before the program started, school cafeterias were serving whole wheat bread and sweet potatoes, but a federal grant has allowed them to expand their offerings.

**Paxton Keeley Elementary School** added pears and kiwi to its fruit selection, which already had oranges, bananas, grapes and three kinds of apples. They are now offering celery sticks, cauliflower, broccoli, cucumbers, radishes and green peppers in addition to lettuce, carrots and tomatoes.

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## Salad days brighten menu

Schools improve lunchroom fare.

By **JANESE HEAVIN** of the Tribune's staff

*Published Saturday, March 11, 2006*

At West Junior High School on Thursday, eighth-grader Alec Vigil piled his tray with spring lettuce, a mix of spinach, radishes and red and green peppers.

Alec admitted he usually prefers a side of potato chips. This time, he opted for salad, not because of health reasons, but because of the new variety of flavors.

"It's not like this normally," he said. "It has all this stuff in it."

Offering something for every taste bud is an ongoing challenge for Columbia Public Schools, said Patricia Brooks, the district director of nutritional services.

"Taste drives our students," she said. "It has to taste good, and it has to look good. It has to be healthy, but that's not what our students think about."

The Columbia school district is constantly looking for ways to offer healthy foods that kids will actually eat, Brooks said.

Brooks recently secured funding from the Department of Defense to expand the salad bar at each school. The new "mega"-bar offers more selections such as kiwi fruit, red and green peppers, and radishes.

West Junior High eighth-grader Amber Bouret seemed impressed with the salad bar as she chose a pear and kiwis to accompany the pasta dish.

"Today they just have, like, a ton of stuff," Bouret said. "I like how they have green peppers and radishes and broccoli."

Although the mega-bar will be available only while funding from the \$47,000 grant holds out, Bouret said she hopes the school continues to offer those choices.

Ninth-grader Mary Porter bypassed the salad bar Thursday but still praised the selection. "The salad bar is really good," she said. "They have a lot of choices."



*Gerik Parmele photo*

Eighth-grader Jasmine Jordan chooses some grapes from the salad bar Thursday at West Junior High School. A federal grant has helped Columbia Public Schools enhance the offerings on school salad bars.

The school district's efforts have not gone unnoticed by parents, either. Alma Hopkins, who has been active in the push for healthier meals at schools, credited Brooks for taking steps to improve nutritional options.

"Her efforts continually add to the health needs of students," Hopkins said.

Hopkins' next goal is to encourage schools to start teaching students how food is grown and processed. Yesterday, she helped set up a "Food Power Adventure" at her son's school, Ridgeway Elementary. Pupils walked through stations depicting farm life, food processing and labeling, and how food nourishes the body.

"We're always working with our children to be lifelong learners of a healthy body and to take care of their bodies, not only now but also when they're adults," Ridgeway Principal Susan Fales said.

Funds from the defense department grant will also be used to supply apple and orange snacks during Missouri Assessment Program testing later this year, Brooks said.

"We're always working to better meet our students' needs," she said.

In addition to the salad bar and hot meals, schools offer items such as baked chips and crackers, sandwiches of cold cuts, and hamburgers.

Still, it's hard to please everyone.

Adrianun Shuck, a ninth-grader at West Junior, skipped lunch altogether Thursday.

"The pasta bar is not my favorite meal," said Adrianun, who sipped on water as her friends ate. "Sometimes the food is pretty good, but a lot of times it's not great."

Adrianun said she planned to head to McDonald's for a meal after school.

"I'm not really into school food," she said.

## CASE STUDY SEEING WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS' EYES

*John Bennett*

Before you can have a plan, you have to have a vision. Whether you're running a single, small elementary school cafeteria or managing hundreds of employees in a large urban district, you can't meet your marketing goals unless you're committed to thinking—and *seeing*—in radically new ways.

The marketing case study that follows describes such a "vision." The events took place at a small, sleepy elementary school in a semirural suburb of Annapolis, Maryland. The insights into marketing success that formed this project (and grew out of it) can be applied in marketing plans for school cafeterias and child nutrition programs, large and small, anywhere in the United States.

### Get in Line for Marketing Success

Debbie Gill figures that she might not have been as successful in her first school food service job if she hadn't been so short. On a good day, Debbie is *maybe* five feet tall, but she turned that lack of stature to her benefit—and the benefit of her customers—when she took over as manager of the Davidsonville Elementary School Cafeteria in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, in early 1992.

Debbie had been inspired to see herself and her job differently by a Maryland School Food Service Association marketing training seminar she attended in March 1992. She decided on the spot that, from then on, she would see the kids as customers, her cafeteria as a restaurant, and herself as a restaurant manager.

"I knew I wanted to make some changes, and the most important change was in my attitude about myself and my work," Gill said. "Once I committed myself to that change, the next trick was to see what my customers saw. So I literally got out from *behind* the line and

got *in* line instead. Since I'm so little, it was easy for me to assume their perspective!"

She didn't like what she saw. A single choice on the lunch line. Days, whole weeks even, when that one choice just didn't look very appealing. A sterile, colorless, institutional setting. Indifferent service. A boring and lifeless menu going home with the kids. She also observed little sense among the staff that school meals were important or even necessary. Not coincidentally, participation at her school averaged just 125 students out of 400, a pathetic percentage for an elementary school.

Debbie had only just taken over at Davidsonville, but she already had a *vision* of a very different place. She was committed to change. Now, she needed a plan to make that vision come to life, to make that commitment pay off. Her near-term, one-year goal was to raise her participation by at least half. She intended to target parents as well as kids. And she intended to build on the strength of her own new-found perception of her cafeteria as a restaurant, of her students as customers. That new way of seeing would drive every change and govern every decision at her new restaurant.

These were the six guiding strategies of the plan Debbie put into action at her school that spring, as follows:

1. *First, Debbie determined to change her way of thinking: the school cafeteria at Davidsonville Elementary School would henceforth and forever be a restaurant.* Debbie's immediate tactics for enacting this strategy were to select a restaurant-style name for the restaurant and to seek permission to increase the number of daily choices on her line from one (some choice, right? Take it or leave it!) to three. She also regularly visited her

kids' favorite local commercial restaurants, not merely as a customer, but as an observer.

2. *Second, Debbie decided from the outset to create ownership for the new restaurant among her customers. The kids were to be actively involved in the creation and operation of the new enterprise.* The first step in creating ownership for her customers was to let them choose the restaurant's name. They chose "Gator Galley," as a tribute to the school's alligator mascot and its location close to the water (a galley, of course, is a ship's kitchen). She also used kids' own artwork to decorate her serving line; regularly sought customer input on menu selections and brands; and featured games, puzzles, giveaways, and promotions on her monthly menu. "The kids always felt that they had a say in what was happening," Debbie said. "It was as much their restaurant as mine. I'd even ask them what vegetables they wanted me to serve. That involvement was crucial."
3. *Debbie's third strategy was to "communicate and conquer." She told everybody what she was doing and asked lots of people for help.* At the time, I was Community Outreach Coordinator for the Child Nutrition Programs at the Maryland State Department of Education. Debbie asked for my help in communicating in new and innovative ways with her customers (we designed a new monthly take-home menu and a newsletter, "Gator Gab," to keep parents apprised of the changes we were making). She sought permission and support from her district office for menu and décor changes she wanted to put in place. She kept her principal and teachers in the loop concerning the progress of the project, and repeatedly underlined to them that the end purpose of Gator Galley was to make Davidsonville's educators' jobs easier by making sure that as many kids as possible came to class ready to learn. She asked vendors for promotional support. She even shanghaied her husband into painting a few gators for her! In short, she knew she couldn't execute all of her plans by herself, so she talked up the project to everyone and asked everyone to contribute a piece of their own expertise and resources. This strategy simultaneously lightened her load and got lots of other folks involved in the project—making them much less likely to find fault with or hinder her efforts at change.
4. *Debbie also "revised" her menu as a marketing, promotion, and educational tool.* New strategies and new outlooks require fresh approaches to all of the tools in one's marketing arsenal. Debbie took a long, hard look at the menu she sent home each month and decided that it was basically just a literal list of food, with no personality and little marketing appeal. With help, she turned it into a marketing dynamo, with games, promotions, giveaways, and interesting information for parents. She was determined to get that place of honor on her customers' refrigerators and keep those customers (and their parents) interested all month.
5. *In her day-to-day operations, Debbie emphasized quality, service, and choice.* Debbie didn't stop getting in line with her customers after that first trip; she made a *habit* of looking at her operation from the customer's point of view. That habit led to a near-fanatical commitment to customer satisfaction, particularly in the areas of food quality standards, customer service, and selection. By the end of the project, she had added pizza every day as a fourth menu item, a far cry from the single choice her customers had always had before.
6. *A final strategy was to change the way the place appeared. The new restaurant*

*demanded a new look.* Gator Galley was like a lot of 1940s and 1950s era school cafeterias: bland, institutional, and sterile, with a predominant motif of stainless steel and pale yellow brick. In short: not very hip. Debbie asked her central office for help, and Director Renee Koehler responded with a modest makeover that nonetheless nicely complemented the other changes and reinforced the new restaurant emphasis. Décor changes included a lively green awning for the serving area entrance, a bright red framework over the serving line that enclosed a rotating selection of student artwork, and gators everywhere. Total cost for the changes was around \$1,200, so this was by no means a radical redesign of the facility—but the changes were enough to give the attitudinal and operational changes another dimension.

One important caveat here: Debbie cautions that décor changes, no matter how extensive, do not offer a magic bullet for transforming a cafeteria into a restaurant. When people call her for insights into making such changes, Debbie says she advises them that “the cosmetic changes are the most expensive ones, and if you can make those kinds of changes, fine, but that shouldn’t be your top priority. First, you need to change your attitude, change the way your people think, offer more choices, offer customers more than they expect, more than they’re used to getting from the school cafeteria. That’s the heart of any change in our business.”

These six strategies formed the basis for Debbie’s marketing plan, and the strategies paid off. Within nine months of the beginning of Debbie’s restaurant project, participation at Gator Galley was up to 189 students on an average day, a 52 percent increase in that short period of time. Best of all, with this framework

for change firmly in place and continuing to guide operations at Gator Galley, participation kept climbing—to 206 a year later, 225 two years later, and (after Debbie had moved on to become manager at a middle school) over 260 six years after Debbie’s initial decision to change the way she perceived herself and her cafeteria. Clearly, this kind of innovative thinking and commitment to the customer carried over to future customers and even to future staff at Gator Galley.

Furthermore, this blueprint had effects beyond Davidsonville Elementary school. The food service office in Anne Arundel County used the Gator Galley experience as a model to turn all 70 of the county’s elementary schools into what they now call “Galley” schools. And employees all over the country have heard about Debbie’s plan for marketing success through customer service training that I’ve conducted. There’s even a “Gator World” at a middle school in Grand Junction, Colorado—that could never have happened without Debbie’s example.

In the final analysis, what does Debbie see as the most important step in the process of changing a cafeteria into a restaurant? *That first step from behind the line.* “Stepping out and seeing what they see, what they expect, and how we’re meeting or not meeting those expectations, that has to come first, last, and during every point in between,” Debbie said. “Sometimes it looks entirely different from their point of view than from the back of the house. No matter what school you’re in or what grade levels you serve, you can learn a lot from capturing that perspective and reacting to it.”

Debbie tried to see with her customers’ eyes. She committed herself to expanding the universe of customer choices. She understood the importance of projecting a new and progressive image of her operation. And she began with a vision that was carefully and painstakingly translated into a workable plan. And the most important part? Her plan worked!