



THE STATE OF THE PLATE: WHAT'S LEFT ON THE TRAYS?

**A SURVEY OF STUDENT CONSUMPTION PRACTICES IN NINE LOS ANGELES
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Los Angeles Unified School District has adopted far-reaching policies to improve student health. First, changes were made to foods and beverages sold in vending machines, student stores and fundraisers. Then, the Board and the Food Services Branch began to focus on strengthening the nutritional quality and participation in breakfast and lunch programs.

Key findings gathered by California Food Policy Advocates during observations of lunch service at LAUSD middle and high schools in 2009 include:

- **Students consumed most of the meals at most of the schools.**
- **Modernization significantly improved facilities, but limited signage and inadequate scheduling still inhibit participation at some schools.**
- **New menu items generated enthusiasm, but inconsistent availability for all students and limited promotion reduced uptake of new food choices.**
- **Students' selections reflect gravitation towards traditional fast food-like items.**
- **Challenges with competitive foods and food running out were noted with significant frequency. Also, students frequently exhibited unfamiliarity with basic nutrition education concepts.**

Summary of top ten recommendations:

1. **Secure higher reimbursement.**
2. **Increase menu signage.**
3. **Definitively resolve long lines.**
4. **Strengthen menu forecasting.**
5. **Improve student behavior indicators.** Because of the significant differences noted between the variety of food choices offered and the (relatively) limited selections by most students, it is essential to begin taking steps to ensure the benefits of LAUSD's nourishing menus translate into improved behavioral habits among students.
6. **Mobilize educational partners.** For example, peer-to-peer strategies, integration of messages into instructional activities and classroom curriculum, and utilization of parents, health teachers and cafeteria staff are all vital approaches to begin improving students' health literacy and decision-making skills.

7. **Develop site-level action plans.** Given the variety of facility and scheduling constraints, unique plans are needed for each school site to resolve the mix of facility, schedule and marketing deficits.
8. **Reduce the availability of competitive foods.**
9. **Update menu planning.** As described in the annual Menu Business Plan, FSB's annual menu planning and development process should be driven by a combination of policy objectives, expanding students' culinary horizons, cost/facility/staff constraints and data from student discussion groups, surveys and cafeteria behaviors.
10. **Empower cafeteria staff to promote the school meal program.**

The report contains a summary of observations, analyses of observations, data on specific schools visited and recommendations for building on the remarkable progress in Los Angeles cafeterias.

INTRODUCTION

This document provides a brief summary of observations of student consumption patterns gleaned during nine visits to Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) secondary school cafeterias. During this time of great opportunity and challenge, it remains CFPA's vision that all students enjoy nourishing, appealing meals in a pleasant school environment. CFPA conducted this plate waste survey to observe and document progress by LAUSD's Food Services Branch (FSB), which serves one half million high-quality meals each day, with nearly 80 percent to free or nearly free students from low-income households.

School meals are more important now than ever; the slumping economy (unemployment in Los Angeles just reached a ten-year high: 10.5%) has increased the need for nutritious school meals as more households struggle with food insecurity. Simultaneously, high numbers of overweight students - nearly 40% in many Los Angeles schools - make the National School Lunch Program's nutritional contributions vital to student health. This report includes CFPA's observations of student consumption patterns and includes observations of environmental factors influencing eating behavior. The report is divided into four parts: Background, Summary of Observations, Recommendations, and Site-specific Observations.

I. BACKGROUND

HISTORY OF LAUSD'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL MEALS

Los Angeles Unified School District has pioneered a preventive approach to student health by establishing numerous policies, practices and programs to optimize student nutritional behavior at schools and teach appropriate, long-term habits. District administrators and elected officials have received numerous national awards and recognition for their groundbreaking work to improve student nutrition.

After establishing policies to reduce student consumption of sweetened beverages at school (Healthy Beverage Motion, 2002), the attention of students, parents, elected officials and community organizations turned towards strengthening the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program. Board policies adopted in 2003 (Obesity Prevention Motion) and 2005 (Cafeteria Improvement Motion) initiated a series of changes to the district's cafeterias:

- Reduced snack foods in vending machines and student stores, directing students to the cafeteria for their calories and nutrition.
- Established the cafeteria as a place of learning, posting nutrition information and signage about menus and good health habits.
- Provided additional servings of fresh vegetables and fruits.
- Modified entrees to limit intake of nutrients found in excess in children's diets (sodium, saturated fat, added sugars, artificial trans fats).
- Increased use of whole grains in recipes.
- Focused on increasing participation, through student discussion groups and feedback, facilities investments, using culinary expertise to modify recipes, etc. Established Cafeteria Committee to provide input.

Additionally, new leadership at the Food Services Branch initiated a series of changes during 2007 and 2008:

- Strengthened personnel by reduced cafeteria staff vacancies, increased training, standardized procedures and provided additional support to schools from an enlarged team of Area Food Services Supervisors.
- Established business plans for Menu Development and Marketing.
- Introduced new entrees, the "Chef's Signature Series", developed by FSB's Executive Chef.

- Invested in technology, modernization of secondary cafeteria lines, aesthetics and equipment.
- Began a series of student discussion groups at a variety of schools in the district.
- Educated students on their rights as the customers of the school cafeteria, ultimately offering a toll-free hotline to accept student comments.
- Engaged students in nutrition by setting up Teen Nutrition Teams.
- Began implementation of a student driven menu.

SURVEY PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Assist Food Services Branch with new menu roll-out and 2009-10 menu business plan by gathering information from cafeterias.
- Determine which menu items are most completely consumed.
- Gauge portion size in relationship to waste.
- Identify specific components that are most/least eaten.

As stated in the project objectives listed above, CFPA is keenly interested in students' menu selections. So, in addition to tracking which entrees were more completely-consumed than others (the primary purpose of the Plate Waste Survey), CFPA attempted to tally which entrees were chosen by students by reviewing menu production records, taking notes at lunch tables and watching students move through lunch lines.

SURVEY PROCESS

CFPA developed a data collection tool, using national templates, as well as input from FSB.

CFPA staff, interns and other community partners (at least two persons per school) visited nine schools to observe student consumption patterns during lunch. Schools were selected based on a list provided by FSB, ensuring geographic diversity and a variety of bell schedules, representing a variety of facilities and communities served by LAUSD.

Observers focused mainly on the amount of entrées being discarded, but took notes on additional observations, such as environmental factors influencing lunchtime behaviors, etc.

School visits were conducted from November 2008 to January 2009. Site visits were pre-arranged with the Cafeteria Manager and Area Food Services Supervisor.

II. SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

- **Consumption.** Simply put, most of the students ate most of the food observed during lunch service at nine schools.
- **Modernization.** In the newly updated and modernized cafeterias the food looked carefully-prepared and nicely-presented; also offered a wide selection of fresh vegetables.
- **Menus.** Several schools offered a wider selection of menu items than expected, including numerous items that were not featured on the printed menu for that day. Cafeteria staff informed CFPA that some schools were preparing additional menu items to help reduce older inventory. This observation did not occur as frequently towards the end of the observations.
- **Signage.** Very few schools had any form of signage or posted menu for that day. Several places were checked at each school site: common areas/quads, hallways, outside cafeteria entrances and cafeteria lines. Even schools that recently underwent modernization posted very little information about lunch choices. When the menu was posted, it was usually an 8 ½" by 11" handwritten piece of paper taped to the windows. In the modernized cafeterias, placards were placed in front of some food items, but many food items were not identified.
- **Meal service times.** Unsurprisingly, long lines were commonplace in each secondary school. At some schools, observers witnessed students tripping over each other while running to get into the lunch line. During student discussion groups, students consistently indicate that time is one of the biggest issues when choosing whether or not to eat in the cafeteria. Many students have said that it takes too long to get through the line and so they won't wait (and won't eat in the cafeteria on those days).

NOTE: While stopwatches were not utilized in this project to measure the actual duration of meal service for the last child in line (A 1989 Board rule specifies that the last child in line shall have twenty minutes to eat), it was clear that at most sites on most days, many students did not have twenty minutes to eat. This is unfortunate given the Board vote on the Health Care For All motion in August 2007 extended hours for several hundred cafeteria workers from three to four hours daily. The motion's proponents indicated that extension of hours would, in part, alleviate long lines. Schools that had recently undergone modernization demonstrated superior line flow and reduced student wait times.

- **Meal sharing.** In nearly all schools a lot of students were observed sharing meals. It was unclear that this practice was in response to a specific motive (assisting a peer without tickets, encouraging a peer to taste certain foods, or simply a strategy to maximize value by trading items). This observation is important because these practices complicate the ability of policymakers to track beneficiaries and the impact of cafeteria meals on specific students.
- **Entree selections.** LAUSD utilizes the Food Based Menu Planning option of the National School Lunch Program and complies with School Meals Initiative requirements for nutrient targets of weekly menus. Additionally, food services implements numerous Board policies going back to 1989 that prescribe additional nutrition specifications, such as prohibitions on certain additives (nitrites), food coloring and reductions in saturated fat content of entrees. When combined with dozens of other efforts (such as FSB's recent certification by the Whole Grains Council, contract changes with the dairy vendor to serve rGBH-free and HFCS-free milks, etc.), LAUSD offers foods to optimize nutrition at school. Students are free to select from the range of entrees (and to decline side dishes, as part of Offer Versus Serve) and, ultimately, students form a variety of eating habits during the 2500-3000 meals they may consume at school before graduation.
- **Student responsiveness to new menu choices.** The most popular addition to the menus, according to student conversations, is the rice bowl series. Additionally, many students spoke very favorably of the chopped fruit. Tally sheets indicated frequent selections of the orange chicken, as well as the Chicken Italiano melt, calzone and macaroni. Few students explicitly identified new menu items with the Chef's Signature Series, but all students expressed enthusiasm for the increased variety of new selections during the course of the week.
- **Extrapolating dietary habits.** Several factors inhibited plate waste observers from drawing major conclusions from the nine site visits: the speed with which students move through lunch lines, significant differences in gender behavior, sharing among students, and limited project sample size. Even with those qualifications in mind, it was clear to all site observers that most students gravitated to the food item(s) each day that most resembled the food items most commonly sold at fast food restaurants (chicken nuggets/strips, burritos, hot wings, burgers).

While these "fast food" type of entrees are procured and prepared according to LAUSD's nutrient specifications, few of these menu items are available in similar calorie-controlled portions, using LAUSD's ingredients and recipes, when consumed at home or at local restaurants. Students may be consuming the necessary nutrients and following the dietary guidelines

when eating lunch at school, however they may not be forming the long-term healthy eating habits that students need. High rates of overweight and obesity indicate that students' food intake is out of sync with their level of exercise (energy imbalance), increasing their risk of developing diet-related diseases.

Additionally, adult perceptions and commentary on the cafeteria often center on the prevalence of pizza and French fries. Even if the pizza is made using lite-mozzarella and the fries are baked, many parents, teachers, nurses and community health partners are less likely to promote cafeteria meals because of their [mis]perceptions about the nourishment and value of the meals.

- **Salads.** Some schools offer attractive salads, but usually only prepared a few and still, salads were often left over. In many cases when salads or vegetable cups were prepared, few were taken and many of the ones taken were left uneaten or thrown away without being eaten, suggesting the need for additional strategies, including nutrition education.
- **Competitive foods.** At eight of the nine sites visited, competitive foods sales were either observed (directly, or promotional signs for junk-food fundraisers were noted) or reported by students and staff as a regular source of food for students.
- **Food running out.** For years, student activists have spoken at Board hearings, written letters to Board Members and conducted surveys to document the frequency that some food choices are not available to all students, particularly the last students in line. FSB implements numerous strategies to reduce food waste and utilizes forecasting measures to attempt to project how many meals to prepare daily. Despite these efforts, observers consistently noted some entrees and side dishes vanishing at each school site well before the last participant reached the serving area. The remaining students were usually offered Peanut Butter Pockets or one of the remaining entrées. During student discussion groups convened by FSB's Menu Committee, this has been a consistent student complaint. However, CFPA observed no student going hungry because of food shortages.
- **Attitudinal issues.** Students occasionally shared their views about their lunch experience. The most common refrains were, "it's like prison or county food", "it's awful", "it's burnt", "it's frozen", "it's gross", etc. This was usually a reflexive, reactionary response that was often contradicted after further questioning. By asking students additional, precise questions, CFPA usually learned that there are menu items they really like. "Give us red grapes more often!" or, "That Chicken Italian sandwich is great!"

Many, many students retain ingrained, negative impressions of the school cafeteria experience that maybe real or just an unjustified, spontaneous reaction.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Secure Additional Resources. Federal and state reimbursements are insufficient to operate the program that students, parents, administrators and elected officials expect. Federal reimbursement for meals served during the 2008-2009 school year (\$2.57 per free meal) increased 4.3% over the previous year – far below increased food and labor costs facing the Food Services Branch. State supplementary reimbursement (\$0.21) dwindled dramatically in 2007-2008 and is expected to vanish before June 2009.

Legislative advocacy, media attention and community mobilizing are needed to explain the value of school nutrition funding and galvanize support for increased resources. Equally important, local district actions are needed to ensure school cafeteria funds must be preserved for student nutrition. Foundation funds can support some FSB functions; philanthropic grants are needed to fill in the gaps.

2. Increase Signage. Daily menu signs need to be placed in and around the cafeteria area so students know their options before reaching the front of the line. If there was signage in plain view with the menu option for that day printed or written on it, students could make a quicker decision when reaching cafeteria staff or merchandisers. Additionally, specific product signage at the point of service will improve line flow and ensure students are aware of their choices. Attractive signage contributes to creating the restaurant-dining environment envisioned for student nutrition, enhancing the image of the cafeteria. While there are ongoing adjustments in menus and a range of inventory and preparation factors that reduce menu and product predictability below 100%, signage is a top student and staff priority, as gleaned during school observations and student discussion groups.

3. Definitively Resolve Long Lines. Different solutions may be needed at different sites. Several schools visited need an additional lunch period; others need a longer lunch period; most need additional points of service and carts; all schools need better supervision and line-flow management. Students frequently noted that people push others out of the way when running to get in line, cut in line and push each other while waiting in line. Efforts are underway to provide schools with a toolkit to reduce wait times. This is a valuable project that will be more effectively implemented with attention devoted to articulating roles and responsibilities, including supervision and opening additional points of service. Cafeteria staff identified teachers or administrators as responsible for schedules. Teachers identified central office or administrators. Administrators identified teachers. A Bulletin from the Superintendent can resolve this confusion and establish a timetable for compliance with the Board's "twenty-minute" directive.

4. **Strengthen Forecasting.** As observed and heard from students, there are consistent incidents of food running out and students receiving Peanut Butter Pockets at the end of the line. Additional forecasting training and new back-of-the-house technology for cafeteria managers and kitchen staff need to be quickly deployed to balance food waste concerns alongside customer concerns over food running out.

5. **Develop Student Behavior Measurements.** Because of the significant differences noted between the variety of food choices offered and the (relatively) limited selections by most students, it is essential to begin taking steps to ensure the benefits of LAUSD's nourishing menus translate into improved behavioral habits among students. Several steps should be considered in 2009:

- a. Harness the new Cafeteria Management System to capture more specific data about the variations in student selections by school site, by grade, by combination with other menu items in order to accurately profile current eating habits.
- b. Articulate numerical targets for specific adjustments in dietary practices. For example, based on CMS data, B.H. Obama middle school might aim for 15% increase in students choosing vegetable and fruit sides, 10% increase in students trying Chef's Signature Series items, etc.
- c. Pilot test different combinations of menus to measure student responses to increased/decreased choices. Using a handful of schools, examine participation, behavior and attitudinal impact of subtracting chicken strips/hot wings/pizza for one month. Test out offer two or three salads, etc. Identify which menu decisions (number of choices, number of vegetarian choices, number of new choices) influence student choices in the cafeteria.
- d. As part of the educational environment, the school cafeteria is in the best position to educate students on healthier eating *behaviors*. Although all menu items follow the nutritional specifications required, there is an opportunity to provide nutritional education through students' food choices. Students may be choosing corndogs made with 51% whole wheat bread, but students *are* still choosing the corndogs. Cafeterias prepare many more of the fast food-like products even though they may be made with healthier ingredients than those purchased at fast food restaurants. Cafeterias should provide limited numbers of these items and serve them on a limited number of days a week. This is an opportunity to teach students that appropriate dietary patterns balance "sometime" foods from "anytime" foods (a core learning concept in several USDA nutrition programs, including WIC).
- e. Publicize goals, challenges and results. FSB's website provides tremendous communications opportunities to upload data, pilot project results, solicit

ideas and engage Los Angeles-area academic communities to strengthen student responses to improved cafeteria meals and menus.

6. Mobilize Educational Partners. Conversations with students at all nine schools underlined the deficit of consistent, relevant messaging to Los Angeles youth about eating and activity habits. Food and beverage industry advertising and marketing budgets cannot be matched, but the district can evaluate its current nutrition education activities and coordinate education initiatives to support the cafeteria as the learning laboratory. For example, peer-to-peer strategies, integration of messages into instructional activities and classroom curriculum, and utilization of parents, health teachers and cafeteria staff are all vital approaches to begin improving students' health literacy and decision-making skills. WIC, Child Care Food Program and First5LA are coordinating use of the "Healthy Habits for Life" materials to ensure seamless delivery of messages. Additionally, Cafeteria Management System data should track the application and effectiveness of educational activities in shaping cafeteria patterns.

7. Marketing of the Healthier Menu Options. The promotional signage at the modernized schools is very attractive and has improved the ambiance of the service areas. Similar approaches can help promote the salads, fruits and vegetables in a way that is enticing to students. Packaging needs to look good and fresh produce needs constant eyes to ensure it has not ripened nor bruised. Salad cups observed often consisted of a small amount of Iceberg lettuce, a small tomato slice or one slice of cucumber in a transparent plastic cup. Coordination between recipe planning and marketing can ensure robust, attractive salads are prepared, presented and consumed.

8. Develop Site-Level Action Plan. Given the variety of facility and scheduling constraints, unique plans are needed for each school site to resolve the mix of facility, schedule and marketing deficits. The Board required a similar plan in 2003, requiring that: "...cafeterias should be places of learning and therefore should provide informational posters and nutrition and nutrient information about all items served in cafeterias." The policy also directed the Superintendent to: "Increase the variety, visibility, and accessibility of fresh fruit and vegetables at school sites through facility design, the creation of site plan..." Engaging school wellness committees, teen nutrition teams, and faculty can strengthen the site-level plans, as well as broaden support for FSB initiatives.

9. Reduce Competition. Despite prohibitions in state, federal and local law, most cafeterias observed compete with unauthorized food sales. FSB should continue to document violations of competitive foods policies and work with the Superintendent to communicate clearly to principals, faculty and staff about the laws and expectations for fundraising at school. Additionally, the principal, or a clear designee needs to be identified at each school site as the individual responsible for supervising food and beverage sales. Additional cafeteria signage around campus will encourage more

students to visit the cafeteria for lunch, as the unauthorized fundraising is well-marketed through signs and posters around many school campuses.

10. Update Menu Planning. As described in the annual Menu Business Plan, FSB's annual menu planning and development process should be driven by a combination of policy objectives, expanding students' culinary horizons, cost/facility/staff constraints and data from student discussion groups, surveys and cafeteria behaviors. Student behavior needs to be more thoroughly tracked and incorporated into future planning decisions.

11. Cafeteria Staff Promotion. Many cafeteria staff reminded observers that students are unwilling to try new menu items and unlikely to consume the vegetables. Obviously reinforced by years of experience with finicky students, these views are not completely unfounded. Unfortunately, this perspective drives some key site-level decisions about the preparation of entrees, side dishes and the type of encouragement students receive in line and during meal service. FSB is strengthening its support of cafeteria staff and should formulate clear training protocol to remind staff of their vital role in shaping students' education about food and long-term habits.

12. Smarter Meal Patterns. A number of the entrees come with bread. This can come in the form of a slice of bread or in a roll of some sort. Observers noticed a large portion of bread items thrown away or left on the trays. For example, lasagna was served a number of times and every time it was served with a slice of bread. More times than not, this slice of bread was thrown in the trash. Food based menu planning appears to require too much bread. LAUSD should seek waiver authority, change menu planning or simply recommend smarter meal patterns to USDA.

IV. NOTES FROM SPECIFIC SCHOOLS

Franklin High School

This school serves approximately 1,200 students in one lunch period. On the day this school was visited, they offered at least six additional menu items not listed on the printed menu, such as nachos and ice cream-like desert bars. There was a small pickle bar area with sliced carrots, radishes, jicama, and pickles as well as bags of carrot sticks. However, students choose to take very few of these items. There were 72 bags of carrots prepared and at the end of the lunch period, 36 remained, as did most of the pickle bar. On this particular day the kitchen ran out of entrees and served approximately 35 peanut butter pockets.

Menu

Wings of Fire & Cheese bread bar – *per manager, an all time favorite* (400 prepared).

Pepperoni Pizza – *from our observations this was cheese pizza, not pepperoni* (288 prepared).

Pretzel Wrapped hot dog (288 prepared).

Mandarin Orange Chicken and rice (300 prepared).

Chicken Caesar Whole wheat wrap – *per manager, the least favorite menu item* (120 prepared).

Fresh cut watermelon.

Celery sticks and ranch dressing { On the menu, these were listed as the daily vegetarian option.

Fresh whole oranges.

Shredded lettuce / tomato.

Chilled apple juice.

Choice of milk.

However, the manager also prepared, a vegetable salad with a cup of macaroni salad in addition to these choices.

| Food Item | All discarded | $\frac{3}{4}$ discarded | $\frac{1}{2}$ discarded | $\frac{1}{4}$ discarded | None discarded |
|--------------------|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Chicken Wings | Not observed | 1 | Not observed | 2 | 13 |
| Cheese Pizza | Not observed | 1 | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| Corn dog | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 3 | 5 |
| Orange chicken | Not observed | Not observed | 1 | 5 | 10 |
| Chicken Cesar Wrap | Not observed | 3 | 5 | 1 | 4 |

Of the entrées observed:

Chicken Wings – 19% fully consumed

Cheese Pizza – 11% fully consumed

Corn Dog – 7% fully consumed
 Orange Chicken – 14% fully consumed
 Chicken Cesar Wrap – 6% fully consumed

Belmont High School

This school is the beneficiary of a recent modernization upgrade. The cafeteria staff all complimented FSB for greatly improving speed of service. On the day CFPA visited, two items were listed on the menu as the “whole grain” items: beef chalupa and toasted cheese sandwich. Neither of which was offered at lunch. Additionally, cinnamon buns leftover from breakfast were served during lunch underneath a sign that advertised, “Steamed Vegetables”. When asked about the discrepancy, line staff indicated, “They love the cinnamon buns!” A giant poster with nutrient specifications was propped behind the doorway, completely obscured by the cafeteria door. The font is very small and the unusual placement undermined its usefulness.

Menu

Hot and Spicy Chicken Strips (588 prepared – 3 remaining at end of lunch).
 Chef salad Americana – with scoop of Tuna salad and packet of Goldfish crackers (30 prepared – 7 remaining at the end of lunch).
 Red chili burritos (80 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch) – comes frozen in plastic wrapper and served in same plastic wrapper.
 Chicken Italiano Melt (120 prepared– 1 remaining at the end of lunch).
 Taco Triangles (144 prepared – 27 remaining at the end of lunch).
 Fruit Basket Medley – lots of fruit remaining in the cafeteria and around the eating area at the end of lunch.
 Fresh Cucumber coins – very few prepared.
 Green Leaf Lettuce and tomato – very few prepared.
 Orange juice.
 Milk.

| Food Item | All discarded | ¾ discarded | ½ discarded | ¼ discarded | None discarded |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Italian Melt | Not observed | 1 | 4 | Not observed | 1 |
| Burrito | Not observed | Not observed | 5 | Not observed | 9 |
| Chicken strips | Not observed | 3 | 4 | 13 | 82 |
| Taco Triangles | Not observed | Not observed | 4 | 3 | 20 |
| Chef salad | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 1 | 1 |

Of the entrées observed:

- Italian Melt – <1% fully consumed
- Burritos – 6% fully consumed
- Chicken strips – 54% fully consumed**
- Taco Triangles – 13% fully consumed
- Chef salad – <1% fully consumed

Hamilton High School

This school offers a salad bar (fruit and vegetable bar) daily. However, on the day CFPA visited, testing was underway in the cafeteria, and thus no salad bar offered, and due to the space constraints, only outside serving windows were open. They did have small bags of carrots available inside the windows, but very few were taken and a lot of ones that were taken were not eaten. One menu item, string cheese with the macaroni salad (the vegetarian option of the day) was served, however string cheese was not observed on any student trays. Students were also observed eating Chinese food from a local restaurant, as well as In-and-Out fries. The only menu signage was hand-written and taped to windows. The last five students in line were only offered Peanut Butter Pockets, as all other food had run out. Additionally, of all the schools sites visited, the school store at this site had the longest lines during lunch service.

Menu

- Pepperoni pizza (250 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).
- Turkey and Provolone sandwich (100 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).
- Macaroni salad (100 prepared– 0 remaining at the end of lunch).
- Turkey and pepperoni calzone (250 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch.)
- Orange juice
- Milk

| Food Item | All discarded | ¾ discarded | ½ discarded | ¼ discarded | None discarded |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Pepperoni Pizza | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 35 |
| Sandwich | 1 | Not observed | 1 | Not observed | 5 |
| Macaroni Salad | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 1 | 3 |
| Calzone | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 2 | 34 |

Of the entrées observed:

Pepperoni Pizza – 43% fully consumed

Sandwich – 6% fully consumed

Macaroni Salad – 4% fully consumed

Calzone – 41% fully consumed

Jefferson High School

This is a Provision 2 school, so all students eat lunch for free and do not need tickets. After all students were served, leftover entrees and side dishes were offered to any student that wanted second portions. This school has no cafeteria and they have not had one for many years. They also have no windows or “shack” to serve from. Lunch is placed on tables outside in a central quad area. It appeared that many students selected an incomplete lunch that only consisted of hash browns and fries (and a beverage).

Jefferson High School offers multiple lunch periods (10:30am!!! and 12:12pm). An Assistant Principal expressed concern that students who participate in the first lunch are hungry by the early afternoon. He shared even greater concern for the (significant number of) students that skip school meals altogether and are unprepared to pay attention in class.

Menu

Chicken Strips (500 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).

Grande Burger (130 prepared– 0 remaining at the end of lunch).

Salad with Vegetable soup (15 prepared – 2 remaining at the end of lunch).

Mesquite chicken and rice (200 prepared – 22 remaining at the end of lunch).

Mac-n-cheese with Tuscan garlic bread (50 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).

Fries and hash browns (approximately 1,200 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).

Salad and cucumber cups – a lot remaining at the end of lunch.

No fruit offered on this day.

| Food Item | All discarded | $\frac{3}{4}$ discarded | $\frac{1}{2}$ discarded | $\frac{1}{4}$ discarded | None discarded |
|------------------|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Chicken strips | 1 | Not observed | Not observed | 26 (mostly bread) | 41 |
| Grande Burger | 2 | Not observed | 2 | 7 (mostly bun) | 10 |
| Salad w/soup | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 1 | Not observed |
| Chicken and rice | 3 | 2 | 10 | 9 (mostly rolls) | 7 |
| Mac-n-cheese | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed |

Of the entrées observed:

Chicken strips – 31% fully consumed

Grande burger – 8% fully consumed

Salad w/ soup – 0% fully consumed

Chicken and rice – 5% fully consumed

Mac – n – cheese – 0% fully consumed

San Pedro High School

San Pedro hosted a student discussion group and menu taste panel in April. San Pedro is also a hotbed of culinary activism, with student-chefs repeatedly operating unauthorized food sales. The cafeteria is geographically distant from many classrooms and there are an unusual number of staircases around this campus, so the facility is not easily conducive to using carts to transport food to additional serving locations, potentially depressing the participation rates in the NSLP. The manager agreed that participation probably would increase, if additional points of service were available.

Menu

Red Chili Burritos (400 prepared – 16 *remaining at the end of lunch*).

Teriyaki Beef Bowl (110 prepared– 0 *remaining at the end of lunch*).

Grilled chicken sandwich (55 prepared – 0 *remaining at the end of lunch*).

Tuna sandwich on Ciabatta bread (50 prepared – 0 *remaining at the end of lunch*).

Hash browns (450 prepared).

Raw veggies with dip.

Steamed broccoli.

Red grapes.

Bags of sliced apples.

Orange juice.

Milk.

| Food Item | All discarded | $\frac{3}{4}$ discarded | $\frac{1}{2}$ discarded | $\frac{1}{4}$ discarded | None discarded |
|--------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Red Chili Burrito (Beef) | 3 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 80 |
| Teriyaki Beef Bowl | Not observed | Not observed | 3 | 10 | 10 |
| Grilled Chicken Sandwich | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| Tuna on Ciabatta bread | 5 | 1 | 8 | Not observed | 11 |

Of the entrées observed:

Red Chili Burrito – 53% fully consumed

Teriyaki Beef Bowl – 6% fully consumed

Grilled Chicken Sandwich – 3% fully consumed

Tuna on Ciabatta bread – 7% fully consumed

LACES (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies)

The cafeteria manager told observers that he rarely needs to serve Peanut Butter Pockets as a last resort because with his years of experience, he accurately forecasts production levels. There is noticeable parent involvement at this school; more students, particularly the youngest ones, brought lunch from home. Unusually, this site, reportedly, experiences significantly less competition from unapproved food fundraisers.

Menu – A limited number of Chicken Italiano Melt sandwiches were prepared. Menu items were adjusted in response to a freezer malfunction, resulting in discarded foods.

Pepperoni Pizza (120 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).

Beef Fajita Nachos (80 prepared– 0 remaining at the end of lunch).

Turkey sandwich (60 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).

Bagel dogs (70 prepared– 0 remaining at the end of lunch).

Chicken Italiano Melt sandwiches (38 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).

Corn & Carrots.

Red grapes.

Bags of sliced apples.

Orange juice.

Milk.

| Food Item | All discarded | ¾ discarded | ½ discarded | ¼ discarded | None discarded |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Pepperoni Pizza | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 1 | 1 |
| Beef Fajita Nachos | Not observed | Not observed | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Turkey sandwich | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 1 | 3 |
| Bagel dogs | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 9 |
| Chicken Italiana | Not observed | Not observed | 2 | 3 | 7 |

Of the entrées observed:

Pepperoni Pizza – 3% fully consumed
Beef Fajita Nachos – 14% fully consumed
Turkey sandwich – 9% fully consumed
Bagel dog – 26% fully consumed
Chicken Italiana – 20% fully consumed

Edison Middle School

Participation went up dramatically after this school implemented Provision 2 non-pricing, beginning in September. Lunch sees 750-785 students per day out of approximately 1,800 students; the Cafeteria Manager indicated that another 700 (mostly different) students eat second chance breakfast during the nutrition break, which is barely two hours before lunch, so she is confident that Edison serves nearly 100% of its students daily, even though many of the second chance breakfast participants are not hungry for lunch. Serving lines moved relatively fast. Many chicken sandwiches were discarded whole or with only one or two bites eaten. Cafeteria Manager told us that the students do not like the taste of the sauce added on the sandwich in the kitchen. 26 Peanut Butter Pockets were served due to entrees running out.

Menu

Red Chili Burritos (360 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).
Baked Vegetable Bruschetta (50 prepared – 0 remaining).
Teriyaki Beef Bowl (120 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).
Grilled chicken sandwich (64 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).
Tuna sandwich on Ciabatta bread (36 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).
Peanut Butter and Jelly Pocket – 26 pulled out due to entrees running out.
Hash browns (360 prepared – 0 remaining)
Raw broccoli with dip – (15 remaining at the end of lunch).
Lettuce and tomato – (13 remaining at the end of lunch).
Bags of sliced apples.
Grapes.
Apple juice – in a bag.
Milk – in a bag.

| Food Item | All discarded | $\frac{3}{4}$ discarded | $\frac{1}{2}$ discarded | $\frac{1}{4}$ discarded | None discarded |
|--------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Red Chili Burrito (Beef) | 8 | 3 | 24 | 9 | 71 |
| Vegetable Bruschetta | 5 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 4 |
| Teriyaki Beef Bowl | 2 | 7 | 16 | 5 | 14 |
| Grilled Chicken Sandwich | 20 | 12 | 4 | Not observed | 2 |
| Tuna on Ciabatta bread | 2 | 3 | 5 | Not observed | 1 |
| PB&J Pocket | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 14 |

Of the entrées observed:

Red Chili Burrito – 29% fully consumed

Vegetable Bruschetta – 2% fully consumed

Teriyaki Beef Bowl – 6% fully consumed

Grilled Chicken Sandwich – 1% fully consumed

Tuna on Ciabatta bread – <1% fully consumed

PB&J – 6% fully consumed

King Middle School

Many students appeared to select entrees and did not select any side vegetables or fruit. A number of students did not eat at all. Milk and juice was observed being thrown away by students, uneaten. There is one additional point of service outside the cafeteria, one cart, but there were no salad or vegetables choices available at the cart.

Menu

Lasagna and bread stick (200 prepared – 40 remaining at the end of lunch).

Breaded chicken sandwich (300 prepared – 29 remaining at the end of lunch).

Beef taco triangles (31 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).

Low-fat turkey corndog (72 prepared – 10 remaining at the end of lunch).

Peanut Butter Pocket (72 prepared – 10 remaining at the end of lunch).

| Food Item | All discarded | $\frac{3}{4}$ discarded | $\frac{1}{2}$ discarded | $\frac{1}{4}$ discarded | None discarded |
|-------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Lasagna and bread stick | Not observed | 4 | 4 | 4 | 36 |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----|
| Breaded chicken sandwich | Not observed | 2 | 8 | 11 | 27 |
| Beef taco triangles | 1 | Not observed | Not observed | 2 | 4 |
| Low-fat turkey corndog | Not observed | Not observed | 2 | Not observed | 3 |
| Peanut Butter Pocket | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 6 |

Of the entrées consumed:

Lasagna – 31% fully consumed

Breaded chicken sandwich – 23% fully consumed

Beef taco triangles – 3% fully consumed

Low-fat turkey corndog – 3% fully consumed

PB&J – 5% fully consumed

Westchester High School

This school uses four windows to feed approximately 260 – 300 students each day out of a total of approximately 1,800 students (<15%). According to the cafeteria manager there are problems with parents refusing to fill out applications due to the federal requirement for Social Security Numbers (parents are allowed to write, “None”, in place of a SSN). Previously, a cart brought an additional 100 – 150 lunches to students, however, it was too heavy for staff to push up the hill to the service location. An electric cart has been requested.

Westchester’s cafeteria faces stiff competition from unauthorized food sales. Not only are sales occurring in classrooms, but students bring foods on campus to sell for profit. This environment threatens the cafeteria’s viability: due to the unpredictable schedule of competing food sales, the cafeteria often has significant food waste, or under-prepares, leaving students disappointed.

Menu

Chicken Tenders (90 prepared – 33 remaining at the end of lunch).

Garden Salad and Soup (20 prepared – 9 remaining at the end of lunch).

Arroz Con Pollo (75 prepared – 37 remaining at the end of lunch).

Grande Burger (96 prepared – 0 remaining at the end of lunch).

Macaroni Au Gratin and Tuscan bread (32 prepared – 12 remaining at the end of lunch).

NOTE: After the lunch period, observers returned to the cafeteria to speak to the cafeteria manager to take note on the leftovers. The manager was visually very upset. He speculated that there had been a teacher providing or selling food to students as over half of all the food prepared was remaining (Observers noted posters promoting a pizza party). The student store manager said her sales were also down dramatically.

| Food Item | All discarded | ¾ discarded | ½ discarded | ¼ discarded | None discarded |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Chicken Tenders | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | 18 |
| Garden Salad and Soup | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed | Not observed |
| Arroz Con Pollo | 2 | 1 | 1 | Not observed | 5 |
| Grande Burger | Not observed | 1 | 2 | 2 | 16 |
| Macaroni Au Gratin and Tuscan bread | Not observed | 2 | 2 | Not observed | 5 |

Of the entrées observed:

Chicken Tenders – 32% fully consumed

Garden Salad & Soup – 0% observed

Arroz Con Pollo – 9% fully consumed

Grande Burger – 28% fully consumed

Macaroni Au Gratin – 9% fully consumed

POSTSCRIPT

While these recommendations outline complex challenges (more daunting, given inadequate resources), the cafeteria observations were largely hopeful. Observations showed that most entrées were fully consumed, however this survey was limited in the number of observations and observers' ability to visually determine percentage of food consumed. A more in-depth and scientific study is needed to adequately assess students eating behaviors.

For too many years, school lunch has been viewed by students as "county food" and/or unhealthy and less than adequate. CFPA believes that LAUSD has made tremendous strides in improving the eating experience at schools and has already begun to transform student attitudes about school meals. The National School Lunch Program meals served in Los Angeles cafeterias are healthy, nutritious and should be the first meal of choice at schools for students and faculty. Research demonstrates that NSLP meals are healthier than what most students either bring to school, or eat outside school campuses. CFPA is eager to continue supporting the district's nutrition revolution.

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