



HACIENDA LA PUENTE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT REDUCING COMPETITIVE FOODS AND BEVERAGES IN SCHOOLS

CASE STUDY | WINTER 2010

Demographics:

- Large pre-kindergarten to 12 school district with 21,673 students enrolled in 34 schools as of June 2009
- 69.3 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals
- Student Ethnicity: 73 percent Hispanic; 14 percent Asian; 7 percent Caucasian; 3 percent African American; 0.4 percent American Indian; 0.4 percent Pacific Islander; 2 percent Other
- All schools have closed campuses

Background

The Food Services Department of Hacienda La Puente Unified School District reduced the number of competitive foods and beverages sold in its schools by no longer selling a la carte entrée items such as hamburgers or burritos and selling them only as part of a complete meal. While former Food Services Director Geri Dee said she was concerned about losing revenue, she noted that “selling healthy, balanced meals is the right thing to do for the students.”

A welcomed and unexpected result was higher profitability for the Food Services Department. Almost half a million more lunches were sold compared with three years ago despite a drop in enrollment of about 1,300 students during that same time period. Three years ago, Food Services sold many a la carte items such as hot entrees, soda, regular chips, cookies and pastries while operating at a loss. The

Associated Student Body (ASB) managed vending machines, which sold similar items, and operated a student store selling snacks at several high schools. Teachers also sold items such as donuts and candy in their classrooms and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and other groups sold unhealthy foods and beverages after school.

Geri remembers learning about California’s nutrition regulations and beginning the job of changing the types of competitive foods and beverages Food Services sold, eventually decreasing the number of items offered by 25-50%, depending on the school. She communicated the need for the changes to her staff and gave school cafeteria managers the authority to choose which compliant products to offer based on their students’ preferences.

Challenges and Solutions

While bringing foods and beverages sold outside the school meal program into compliance continues to be a big job, Geri said she knew that she would have an even bigger challenge educating principals, teachers, ASB advisors and PTAs of the need to stop selling non-compliant foods and beverages.

Gaining principal support is crucial, said Geri, who noted they’re “the determining factor at their schools.” Finding the best ways to reach principals



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with information and resources remains a challenge, said Geri, who adds that she wishes she had put more effort into this earlier on in the process. However, as a result of providing principals with information on nutrition regulations on numerous occasions, fewer teachers are selling foods and beverages in their classrooms and there has been a big decrease in other types of foods and beverages sold during school hours.

Geri said that the ASB stores and vending machines sell mainly compliant foods, however, each school contracts with vendors, individually, so oversight is difficult. As a solution, Food Services has offered to oversee a centralized vending contract and supply all the food to the student stores, which would save each ASB time and likely result in greater profits, Geri said. She hopes the ASBs will take her up on that offer in the near future.

Geri said that the sale of food after school by PTAs and other groups continues to be an issue, although more information about alternative fund raising has recently been provided to the groups. Geri has found that one way to reach parents is to have Food Service staff participate in Back to School Nights. This fall, staff participated in the event at three high schools and found parents to be very receptive to the information provided. Geri pays staff to attend these events and continues to encourage staff at all schools to participate.

Results

Within the first year of cutting back on the sale of competitive foods and beverages in Food Services, Geri was pleased to see the number of meals purchased increase to 2.5 million meals and the depart-

ment's profit increase to \$283,000. The next two years saw a drop in enrollment in the district; however, the number of meals sold increased. Overall, the number of meals sold has increased 15% in the past three years despite a 9% decrease in enrollment, resulting in an increase of nearly 60% in profitability. Below is an overview of the district's Food Services revenues.

Financial information

05/06 school year lost \$156,000 selling 2.4 million lunches to 23,000 students
06/07 school year made \$283,000 selling 2.5 million lunches to 22,250 students
07/08 school year made \$373,000 selling 2.7 million lunches to 22,000 students
08/09 school year made \$118,000 selling 2.8 million lunches to 21,600 students

This increased profitability allowed Food Services to invest in improving the eating areas and increasing the number and attractiveness of the points of sale. Professional menu boards will be placed in high schools and, as a result of the many questions parents had at the high school Back to School Night events, an informational brochure is being provided to parents.

Geri said that all competitive foods and beverages sold through Food Services comply with nutrition regulations. The district has a long-standing policy that only Food Services can sell foods and beverages during the school day in grades K-8. Other groups like PTAs can sell competitive foods and beverages only after school.

A recent look at two high schools showed very similar profits even though one school sold almost no competitive foods and the other offered a wide variety of them.

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At high schools, compliant a la carte items sold by Food Services are available at few points of sale during lunch. Geri said that the number of compliant competitive foods and beverages offered differs from school to school as the cafeteria manager at each school has the authority to choose items from a district-approved list. A recent look at two high schools showed very similar profits even though one school sold almost no competitive foods and the other offered a wide variety of them. Geri said that she will try to use this information to encourage other schools to further decrease competitive products and promote meals instead.

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