



ANDERSON UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT REDUCING COMPETITIVE FOODS AND BEVERAGES IN SCHOOLS

CASE STUDY | WINTER 2009

Demographics:

- High school district serving 2,062 students in four high schools and one community day school
- Student Ethnicity: 71 percent White; 15 percent Hispanic; 6.5 percent American Indian or Alaska Native; 3 percent African American; 2.5 percent Other; 2 percent Asian
- Served 173,878 meals during the 2008/2009 school year
- 73 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals with an increase expected
- All schools have closed campuses

Background

It was a field trip to the Folsom Cordova Unified School District several years ago that convinced the Anderson Union High School District food services director to cut all competitive foods and beverages from the cafeteria. Folsom Cordova's school nutrition program had drastically reduced competitive foods and beverages and focused primarily on selling complete meals.

Food Services Director Barbara Camacho joined the Anderson district after the competitive products were eliminated. She later learned that in response to that action, "teachers set up shop in their classrooms and made money selling snacks until they were made to shut down."

Prior to making the changes, snack foods and soda were also sold in the student stores and vending machines run by the Associated Student Body.

Challenges and Solutions

The resulting revenue impact of suddenly cutting competitive foods and beverages was drastic. A \$19,000 deficit during the 2004/2005 school year grew to \$75,000 the next year. During the 2006/2007 school year, the district sold 134,200 meals but the food services' deficit rose to \$110,000. The low point in revenue was realized in the 2007/2008 school year when the deficit reached \$137,000. That is when Barbara was hired as the new food services director.

"The cafeterias had been painted and decorated with stencils and awnings right after the competitive foods were cut so the eating area looked nice," Barbara recalled. "But the same hot entrée was sold for five days in a row and there was only one type of pizza and green salad available all year."

Food Services, with the assistance of Shasta County Public Health, conducted student taste tests of cafeteria foods and changed the menu to include a different hot entrée every day, three different salads,



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four sandwiches and a variety of pizzas. At least one vegetarian salad and pizza choice was made available every day as a result of student requests. Changing up the side dishes also encouraged students to purchase complete meals. For example, a salad replaced potato wedges as the side dish with pizza and sales shot up, requiring a separate pizza line to speed service. The pizza itself was the unique invention of a partnership between the public health department and Anderson High School. During a bean education program called “Meatless Monday,” a bean puree was created and taste-tested and approved by students to add to the pizza sauce, creating a thicker sauce with added fiber.

“We try to serve what the students already like, but make the recipe healthier,” said Barbara.

While the emphasis is on complete meals and no a la carte entrees are sold, a small variety of a la carte snacks are available, including pretzels, fruit, trail mix, beef jerky and a low-fat cookie. Water and 100% fruit juice are the only beverages sold a la carte.

Food Services manages all the beverage vending machines in the cafeteria area and ensures the drinks are compliant with California nutrition standards. Some schools have one or two beverage or snack machines that benefit the Associated Student Body. On these campuses, the school principal is responsible for making sure the products comply with state law. Student stores no longer sell foods or beverages.

Results

During the first year (2008-2009) of the varied menu, the Food Services’ deficit was almost cut in half to \$77,000. Nearly 174,000 meals (both lunch and breakfast) were sold that same year, an increase of 37 percent. Barbara credits the increased menu variety for the drastic increase in the sale of school meals, especially since the district’s population fell slightly during this period.

Marketing the new menu items to students and their parents also contributed to the increase in sales. A student orientation for the 8th graders coming to high school was held in the fall. Food Services provided samples of the school meal to students and their parents so they could see and taste the food. In addition, Shasta County Public Health staff provided nutrition education and incentive items for participation in the discussion surrounding school meal applications. Food Service staff also attended Back to School Night events.

“I have to give Public Health credit for getting me involved in things like Back to School Nights,” said Barbara. “I think that’s helped a lot.”

The district also is making an effort to keep students hydrated and drinking water. Two years ago, filtered water coolers, funded through Shasta County Public Health, were installed in the cafeterias at two high schools. Refillable water bottles were given to students. The water cooler is accessible all day.

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