



# ...WHAT'S FOR LUNCH?

Want Biometrics in your lunch line but don't have a POS from Food Service Solutions?



**CHECKOUT BioWedge**

[www.biometricsolution.com](http://www.biometricsolution.com)

BioWedge is very easy to set up and configure for existing point of sale software packages for a completely integrated biometric identification system.

Inside this issue:

**Totally Un-Cool: Students Would Rather Go Hungry Than Eat Free Lunch**  
pgs 1-2

**Hot-button Food Service Dilemma: To Outsource or Not to Outsource**  
pgs 2-3

**More Children Eating Healthy School Meals During Economic Downturn**  
pgs 3-4

## Totally Un-Cool: Students Would Rather Go Hungry Than Eat Free Lunch

by: Lukas Ercanbrack

Who would have ever thought that school lunch would be the source of your social demise when in high school? Sure, unsightly acne was always a list topper, as was out-of-date fashions and the fear of body odor, but school lunch...seriously?



Such is the case in high schools across the country, and many students are essentially starving themselves as a result. No, they are not boycotting lunch lines citing poor food quality, or because schools aren't providing them with the pizzas, hamburgers and other junk foods that they're used to eating on a daily basis. These students are choosing to forgo lunch because they fear the social stigma of being labeled as one of those that qualify for a free or reduced-price meal.

The lunch period is one of few times students have to impress their peers, and being seen in line for a subsidized meal effectively highlights their family's financial status. According to many of these students, they'd rather bear the pain of hunger than bear the shame of taking a hit to their social standing.

This issue is becoming a real problem for schools in San Francisco. Officials there are actively looking for ways to encourage students that qualify for the program to accept the government-financed meals. Only 37% of San Francisco area high school students that qualify actually take advantage of the subsidized meal program.

The stigma associated with eating for free while others are paying for food is not unique to San Francisco. It is an issue that many

school districts across the U.S. are silently combating, and with varied results. For example, schools in New York have had moderate success in promoting the program by inviting players from the Mets, Jets and Giants to visit their campuses in uniform and join students in eating the subsidized meals. Schools in Berkley, California have attempted to combine the two lines into one in hopes that they can combat the social justice issue.

Unlike Berkley, most schools in the U.S. have a dual line system. One line that serves fast food and à la carte items for cash, and one that serves government-subsidized meals (also available to paying students). The catalyst for the separation of lines was a federal requirement that all subsidized meals must meet a minimal nutritional standard, and that all foods that did not meet that standard were no longer allowed to be sold in the same place.

**Only 37% of San Francisco area high school students that qualify actually take advantage of the subsidized meal program.**

Schools suffering from this issue have several reasons for being concerned. By refusing to eat, students are depriving themselves of the necessary energy they need to stay focused and do well in school. A poor free and reduced-price meal eligibility percentage also has an effect on a school's Title I and E-rate funding. This funding is dispersed based on the number of students enrolled in free and reduced program, not on the number of students that are actually eligible to receive the support. This can translate to thousands of dollars in lost funding used to upgrade the

technologies schools need to remain progressive and competitive.

Schools that are successful in efficiently combating the problem have found feasible alternatives to the dual line system. One such method is by going back to offering the same food to all students. Another option is to have students pay with either debit cards or by scanning their fingers. The use of cards and finger scan readers completely eliminates the overt identification of students receiving free and reduced-meals, which is expressly

prohibited by the National School Lunch Act.

Although these technologies are seen as effective solutions to the un-cool school lunch debacle, it has been hard for schools to come up with the funding necessary to purchase these systems to date.

Some good news comes in the form of the recent economic stimulus package, which contains funding aimed specifically at improving lunchroom technologies.

Schools have the opportunity to take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make a difference in the lives of those students opting to starve themselves to popularity. The timing of this stimulus couldn't be better. Students have enough to worry about in high school. Whether or not to eat lunch shouldn't be one of them.

## Hot-button Food Service Dilemma: To Outsource or Not to Outsource

In times like these, schools are under immense pressure to first cut costs then squeeze all they can out of every penny. As budgets move from small to smaller, an increasing number of school districts are beginning to consider the possibility of outsourcing their food service needs.

While such an idea is sure to cause some angst among food service workers, and rightly so, one cannot escape what outsourcing can mean to a school's or district's bottom line.

Few outside the food service operation can fully understand the difficulty of balancing government regulations and nutritional worries against marketing and customer service, and food management companies can be seen as a real asset. Even so, before jumping in head first one should first educate themselves on the realities of food service outsourcing and the effects it will have on all involved.

### **The Outsourcing Options**

The practice of outsourcing is more prevalent in some states than others. Those that top the list are New Jersey, Michigan and Florida, with statewide school food service outsourcing rates of between 20-70%. While some states encourage their school districts to investigate outsourcing as a means of cutting costs, others take a neutral stance.

When it comes to outsourcing food services, the options are as varied as flavors of ice cream. While some schools choose to limit the responsibilities and tasks they outsource, others find it beneficial to hand over everything – from food purchases to payroll. Schools that choose to go this route must first consider the effect it will have on their existing personnel.

Contracting with food service providers is not without controversy. The reputations of a schools' food service department and the welfare of its longtime employees is as at stake, with fears that their positions will be terminated in the drive to cut costs. While the pressure placed on school system leaders and their governing boards forces them to examine every budget item for cost savings, they must always remember the effect their decisions will have on their food service staff.

### **Buying Power**

Schools and districts may see a benefit in investing in their local economies by purchasing local produce, but when times are tough, credence must be given to cutting costs, and there is a lot of money that can be saved.

---

**Many schools do not seem to adequately contemplate the correlation between free and reduced-price lunch enrolment and the amount of Title 1 and E-rate funding they receive**

---

Put simply, food service management companies are unsurpassed when it comes to purchasing efficiency. They are

able to purchase food at quantity levels that dramatically decreases the per unit cost. Spending less on each brick of cheese frees up funding for use in the classroom, putting the focus on what schools do best—educating kids.

### **Marketing School Lunch**

Besides offering school districts economies of scale, private-sector companies have at their fingertips marketing resources and products that are out of reach of most self-operated school food service programs. These companies can also offer training and education for food service workers.

Contract management companies can tap into a wealth of interesting recipes and the experience of food service experts to revamp cafeteria menu offerings and increase participation. That, in turn, increases revenue for the food program, freeing up additional money that can be spend toward educational needs.

When school lunch participation rates increase, schools districts profit in other ways as well. Many schools do not seem to adequately contemplate the correlation between free and reduced-price lunch enrolment and the amount of Title 1 and E-rate funding they receive. This funding is awarded based on the number of students in the free and reduced-price program, and certain food service contract companies are capable of aiming their marketing efforts toward encouraging eligible families to apply.

Most contract management companies have established methods for luring more students to the lunch line. Examples include transforming lunchrooms to resemble mall food courts, providing appealing giveaway items such as Frisbees or MP3 players, and offering special snacks

or awards that students or classes can win, such as pizza or fresh fruit parties.

### **The Human Toll**

As mentioned previously, reaping the benefits of food service outsourcing often comes at the expense of human capital, and that is a political price some school boards do not want to pay unless they have no other option.

It is obvious that employee costs and labor relations are the biggest obstacles when it comes to privatizing food services. When done correctly, outsourcing saves school districts money, and typically the biggest savings come as a result of completely relinquishing control of their food service departments. The reasons being that contract management companies can complete the job with fewer personnel and they can better stem the rising expense of benefits packages.

### **Other Alternatives**

Districts with struggling food service programs are not left with contract management companies as their only option. The American School Food Service Association and state school food service associations are available to help evaluate school lunch programs. Help is also available from state departments of education as well as the Associate of School Business Officials. Sometimes schools can dramatically improve their bottom line by developing stronger leadership in their food service departments.

Before abandoning self-operated programs, districts they should thoroughly research their options. Requests for proposals from proprietary firms should be specific and detailed, and proffered contracts should be studied carefully. District administrators should check with their state's department of education to make sure special rules don't govern such arrange-

ments. It is also a good idea that school boards first ask their district's current food service department to offer a proposal before making any sort of decision.

Keep in mind that if a district decides that contract management is the right move for them, the district administrator still must audit the food service program to ensure the USDA guidelines are being followed and that food quality is maintained.

*NOTE: This article contains excerpts from "Hot potato in the school cafeteria: more districts outsource their food services, but some raise questions about personnel relations and savings" written by Kate Beem published in School Administrator on 27 Apr, 2004.*

## **More Children Eating Healthy School Meals During Economic Downturn**

High unemployment rates and families' proactive efforts to save money have resulted in significantly more students eating lunch at school. According to *Saved by the Lunch Bell: As Economy Sinks, School Nutrition Program Participation Rises*, a report released today by the School Nutrition Association, nationwide an average of 425,000 more students are participating in free and reduced school lunch programs. More than three quarters of districts surveyed reported an increase in free school lunches provided, meaning the effects are being felt in districts across the country. Because the school-based child nutrition programs are entitlement programs, federal reimbursements will be provided to schools for each meal served; however, the amount of reimbursement provided continues to fall short of the actual costs associated with producing each school meal.

The survey of over 130 school nutrition directors from 38 states found that 79% of

districts saw an increase in the number of free lunches served while nearly 65% saw an increase in the number of reduced price lunches served over last year. Participation by students paying the full price for

---

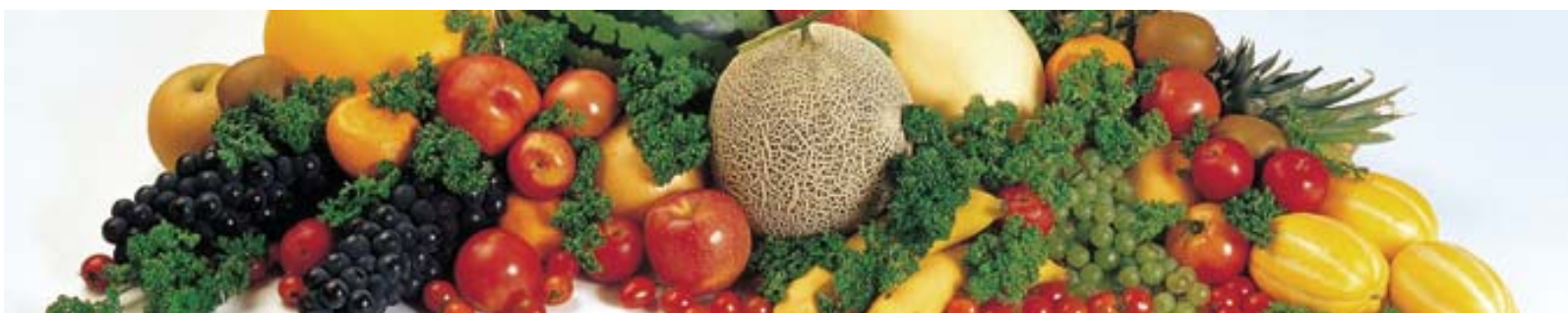
**More than three quarters of districts surveyed reported an increase in free school lunches provided, meaning the effects are being felt in districts across the country**

---

school lunch decreased in 48% of districts, reflecting a potential shift in the economic status of many American families. Almost

60% of survey respondents reported an overall increase in National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation, with over 69% reporting an increase in participation in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) in spite of a slight decline in school enrollment this school year compared to last school year.

While the report is another indicator of grim economic news, SNA president Dr. Katie Wilson, SNS, emphasized that, "this year, when hunger is more common, more students are able to eat a balanced, nutritious meal at school." Meals served under the NSLP must meet nutrition guidelines based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, therefore no more than 30% of calories can come from fat and less than 10% from saturated fat. School lunches provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, iron, calcium and calories over the course of one week of menus. Students who eat school lunches consume fewer



calories from fat than students who bring lunch from home, according to research conducted by Dr. Alice Jo Rainville of Eastern Michigan University. Additionally, school lunches contain three times as many dairy products, twice as much fruit and seven times the vegetable amounts compared to lunches from home.

As school nutrition professionals feed the increasing number of students participating, 88% of school nutrition directors reported this past August that the NSLP reimbursement of \$2.57 per free lunch served was not sufficient for their program to cover the costs of producing a meal. Based on an estimated average cost to prepare a school lunch (including labor, food and other inputs) of about \$2.92, and revenue of anywhere from \$2.52 to \$2.77 to offset that cost (from federal reimbursements, commodity entitlement and the average price paid for a school lunch) school nutrition programs are experiencing a potential loss of at least \$4.5 million per school day based on 30 million school lunches provided. School nutrition directors continue to call on Congress to enact legislation, through an economic stimulus package or child nutrition reauthorization, that would provide an adequate meal reimbursement to ensure nutritious school meals continue to be provided to children.

Any child at a participating school may purchase a meal through the National School Lunch Program. Children from families with incomes at or below 130% of

the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals, for which students can be charged no more than 40 cents. During the current school year, 130% of the poverty level is \$27,560 for a family of four; 185% is \$39,220. Children from families with incomes over 185% of poverty pay a full price, though their meals are still subsidized to some extent. Local school boards

still represents a bargain when compared to the national average cost to prepare a lunch from home, estimated to be \$3.41. School nutrition programs are required to operate their meal services as non-profit programs.

Article provided by:



[www.schoolnutrition.org](http://www.schoolnutrition.org)

The School Nutrition Association is a national, non-profit professional organization representing more than 55,000 members who provide high-quality, low-cost meals to students across the country. The Association and its members are dedicated to feeding children safe and nutritious meals. Founded in 1946, SNA is the only association devoted exclusively to protecting and enhancing children's health and well being through school meals and sound nutrition education.

---

**Meals served under the NSLP must meet nutrition guidelines based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, therefore no more than 30% of calories can come from fat and less than 10% from saturated fat**

---

generally set their own prices for full-price (paid) meals, with the national average at \$2.08 after many districts raised their meal prices earlier this year. Paid school lunch

...WHAT'S FOR LUNCH?

4



**3101 Pleasant Valley Blvd.,  
Altoona, PA 16602**

**Phone: 1-800-425-1425**

**Fax: (814)941-7572**

**Email: [sales@foodserve.com](mailto:sales@foodserve.com)**



**SIMPLE, RELIABLE, AFFORDABLE**

*Food Service Solution's ability to develop creative solutions to make our customer's job easier, more profitable, and better managed has made us a leader in our industry. With over 85 years of combined experience in institutional food services, our staff is dedicated to providing our customers with state-of-the-art software & hardware systems that are fully integrated to meet the unique needs of food service professionals.*

[www.foodserve.com](http://www.foodserve.com) - [www.planyourprofit.com](http://www.planyourprofit.com) - [www.biometricsolution.com](http://www.biometricsolution.com)