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# AUHSD Trims the Fat in High School Food Service

*By Andrea A. Firth*

Facing an estimated operating loss of over $250,00 in the food service program for the last school year, the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing Board established a task force in April to review the program. The task force was charged with the goal to find ways to provide healthy and attractive lunch options for AUHSD students while remaining a profitable program. Board member Richard Whitmore, who served on the task force along with fellow Board member Vanessa Crews and several students and faculty members, presented their recommendations at the most recent meeting of the AUHSD Governing Board. A survey of over 1,000 students, staff, and parents revealed some interesting, but not all that surprising, information about attitudes toward the lunchtime meal with respect to price, nutrition, and convenience. Price while not all that important to parents and staff was an important factor to students. Nutrition and convenience registered low in importance to kids and high with parents and staff. "Give me fries" seemed to be the mantra of many of the students surveyed. Armed with these data, the task force met four times to come up with a list of recommendations to help move the food service program out of the red and into the black. To address the profitability issues facing the program, the task force proposed three key recommendations: increase prices (with the price of combo meal being raised to $4.50); find more profitable menu items (that meet nutritional guidelines but consider student requests); and reduce options to high volume sales items. Several recommendations were made to improve the quality of the food served such as changing the components of meals and exploring new vendors for packaged snacks such as protein bars and cereal. The Governing Board chose to act immediately on the task force's recommendation to implement a mealtime buying card system at the high school sites to improve efficiency and access. The buying card system, which will be driven off the student's identification number, eliminates the need for a cash transaction, although purchasing with cash will continue to be an option. Chris Learned, Assistant Superintendent of Business Services Chris, explained that the key benefits of the system are cash control and inventory management. "We need to turn this program around," stated Learned. "This system should save us money." With a unanimous vote the Board approved the purchase of the point of sale software to be first installed ay Miramonte High School and to follow at the other schools in the District within the year.

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