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Rolling out universal meal service at schools has joys and disappointments

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Stephens spoke about the difficulty of providing adequate food to students with less than adequate staffing and delivery challenges. On day one, the driver hired by Sodexo failed to report for work. Lafayette has to bring food from the preparation sites at the two Lafayette schools with kitchens to the three schools without kitchens. The rollout of the meal program was not immune from the current national labor shortage and supply chain problems. Sodexo's staffing was running at 50% of what Lafayette needed. However, Stephens was quick to point out, parents who saw what was happening immediately came forward and volunteered to help in the short term. The Lafayette superintendent sent out a letter to parents explaining the difficulties, promising to work on improvements, thanking them for their help and offering suggestions for their children, such as advising the schools of any allergies and perhaps packing food for their children just in case.

Things seemed to go more smoothly in Moraga. Although some food choices were not available, generally students were able to get something to eat and be back in class on time. Moraga School District Superintendent Julie Parks posted a video report on YouTube answering frequently asked questions about the new program, which she called new and exciting. "This is big news, a big change here in Moraga," she said, lauding California's move to be the first state in the nation to offer universal meal service to students as amazing progressive legislation. "We are learning each and every day how to manage this new and exciting project." In just the first two days, Moraga served 722 breakfasts and lunches at

Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School and about 2,000 breakfasts and lunches at Moraga elementary schools. This compared with the previous program that served about 150 students per day.

Moraga served meals with four Sodexo staff, eight district office staff, and 24 volunteers. Donald L. Rheem Elementary School Principal Brian Sullivan, presiding over the first week of school was glad to hear that Moraga seemed to be faring better than Lafayette or Orinda, but, he said, in fairness, the other two districts have a lot more students to feed.

In Orinda, Superintendent Aida Glimme at the end of the first week sounded a bit frazzled as she reported that some Orinda schools were seeing a 95% uptake on school meals when 50% had been predicted. Even children with packed lunches in their hands wanted to try the new school food. "It's been a messy rollout," she admitted, with long lines and choices and even food running out. "It's not OK for now," she said, adding that Sodexo has been very responsive and they were hoping for a major change the second week of school. OUSD board member Carol Brown added that Sodexo sent out so many of their employees, including their CEO, to help with the rollout of the school meals programs.

The parents are very understanding of the tough rollout, she said. Glimme also mentioned that, although the schools are being reimbursed for each meal served, they were not given any funding to update infrastructure. Although some comments on social media suggested that students had been told to hold off on school lunch to allow those who need it more to go first, Glimme said she was unaware of any such requests. "I've been at every school every day," during the

first week, she said. "I've yet to see a child turned away. It is open to all, and we encourage you to try it."

Parents on social media expressed relief at no longer having to pack school lunches, as well as concerns about the quality and quantity of the food. There was certainly an awareness that it was still early and there was a willingness to help. Liz Johannesen is a parent of two at Springhill Elementary School in Lafayette. She has a great deal of experience in school food service, including working seven to eight years at Stanford. Her main concern is to keep the program going. She feared that early implementation problems might cause some parents to drop out of the program and urged parents, "Don't just walk away." One in six children suffer from food insecurity in our nation, she said, and even when it is not evident, some children can fall through the cracks. As a parent, Johannesen was very happy with the popular Choice Lunch program offered in Lafayette in the past, which were high quality and allowed for up-sizing portions.

The Moraga School District sent out feedback forms to all families at the end of the first week of the meal program to gather information. "Moraga has never run a program like this," Parks said, "and we really appreciate everyone's patience as we navigate a complicated system."

Acalanes Union High School District Superintendent John Nickerson reported that he believes the AUHSD food service program has gone pretty well this year. The high schools, unlike the elementary and middle schools, have already been doing universal meals for a year. "They are still working out kinks in lines and we are slightly understaffed," Nickerson said, "but I hear reports that it is going well."

State Secretary of State's Office strives to squelch election process rumor mill

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In fact, California's voting technology is layered with security. The state conducts source code review and evaluation, hardware and software security penetration

testing, open ended vulnerability testing, operational testing to validate system performance and functioning under normal and abnormal conditions, and more. The systems are not connected to the internet, and they don't have modems or hardware in them that could be remotely "activated." All technology software, firmware and hardware meet or exceed federal guidance including that of the Justice Department, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the Election Assistance Commission. The SOS assures that, "California has the strongest voting security system standards in the country."

The phrase "Big Brother is watching" comes into play with the rumor that observers are allowed to interfere with voting or touch voting materials. In fact, this is against the law, the SOS says. Neither observers or election officials are allowed to collect private voter information, violate ballot secrecy, campaign, or conduct any other form of interference. If you feel that you have been a victim of voter intimidation or have witnessed suspicious behavior, contact SOS at: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/publications-and-resources/voter-complaint>.

A rumor circulated that videos, images, or emails suggesting voter registration information was being manipulated and meant that voters would not be able to vote. In

fact, voters are requested to check the source of this disinformation and call their state or local election offices for accuracy.

One rumor would almost be funny if it weren't a possibility that California's return envelopes were designed with holes to allow election officials to peek inside and toss out ballots. In fact, it is illegal for election officials to tamper with the election process, and this includes throwing away ballots. The holes were designed to help visually impaired voters know they are signing their official ballot envelopes, and to help officials ensure that each ballot envelope has been extracted from the outside envelope without inspecting the ballot.

The last rumor that the SOS felt the need to quell implied that Californians with a felony background are prohibited from voting in the state's elections. In fact, an individual with a criminal history can register to vote based on the following criteria: if they are on parole, probation, mandatory supervision, under post-release community supervision, federal supervised release, or in a county jail. They cannot vote if they are currently serving a state or federal prison term for the conviction of a felony. Upon release, their right to vote is automatically restored and they should visit: RegisterToVote.ca.gov or fill out a paper registration form.



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