

ARE YOU GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR REIMBURSABLE MEALS?

Contributed by Star Food Healthy Express

Today's foodservice professionals are challenged to maintain revenue streams that are being eroded by the loss of soft drink and snack sales and the reduction of a la carte menu items. In addition, personnel policies, labor costs, pressure on lunch room space, class schedules and limited time all contribute to the need to explore more efficient and effective methods of delivering important nutritional benefits to students.

The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) recognizes that vending machines may play an expanding role in the operation of the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program. FNS has guidance for school foodservice directors on how to use vending machines to provide reimbursable school meals. (See how to access this information at the end of this article.) The most important thing to keep in mind is that a vending machine used to serve reimbursable meals must be operated in compliance with program regulations.

Cashless vending machines may help schools with lunch programs and may help solve the problem of too many students to feed in too little time. Star Food is one of the leaders in developing reimbursable meal solutions that meets FNS guidelines to feed more students and at the same time increase school revenue. These cashless machines are also designed with a point-of-sale (POS) interface to match most existing POS systems.

In a program held at St. Petersburg High School in Florida, a Star Food cashless vending machine resulted in increased



Students at a St. Petersburg High School thought that the state-of-the-art technology on this vending machine was "cool".



Vending machines can provide healthy, time-efficient choices for lunch, breakfast and after-school snacks.

lunch sales of 25%. Art Dunham, former Director of Foodservice for the Pinellas County School District, was extremely pleased with the results and went on to add more Star Food Healthy Express units throughout the district. Not only was the acceptance by the student body and the school principal very positive, but also students like the ease of making a selection using their birth date and the pin pad. They thought the use of state-of-the-art technology was "cool".



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Key questions to ask when considering a vending machine purchase include:

- How quickly do the students receive their selection?
- What are the specific capabilities of the machine?
- How does the machine comply with FNS guidelines, especially regarding properly dispensing a reimbursable meal and accurately documenting when a reimbursable has been selected by a student?

These cashless vending machines not only allow kids healthy, time-efficient choices for lunch, but also for breakfast and after-school snacks. They also provide schools an innovative reimbursable meal revenue generating solution.

For more information about the USDA's guidelines for vending machines in school meal programs, visit www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2007/SP_03-2007.pdf. To learn more about how Star Food can help schools fulfill requirements to feed more kids, visit www.reimbursablemeals.com or call 954-491-7300 ext. 1.