

Solving the lunch crunch

Third lunch period aims to solve overcrowding, high energy

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For the first time since the 2006-07 school year, PHS has three lunch periods. The third lunch period was implemented in November because of overcrowding in the cafeteria, which was causing long lunch lines and less time for students to eat. Out of 175 students surveyed, 58 percent went without eating at least once due to long lines during the two-lunch format.

"[The assistant principals] were all receiving phone calls from parents saying 'My kid didn't eat' or 'There's not enough time.' We knew we had an issue," assistant principal Laura Brown said. "Not to mention that the energy level in some of the lunches was really high. You could feel it in there. We all knew it was something we needed to address."



Food service workers chat during lunch. All PHS meal services are provided by Aramark. "We serve more than 26,000 meals a day," said Geoff Holle, Aramark's district manager and food service director. Photo provided by Mercedes Ezeji

The cafeteria became more crowded than previous years during lunch, in part, because teachers and administrators have cracked down this year on underclassmen going off campus.

"Students [were] going down to [the strip] and being unsafe, fighting with each other, things like that," Brown said. "Most of these kids [were] not seniors."

At the beginning of the year, administrators also made the decision to no longer allow students to eat lunch in A hall, forcing more students to eat in the cafeteria.

"The reason why [we closed A-hall] is there are math classes right there that get interrupted," Brown said. "It's noisy when people are trying to teach classes. It's also an area that is messy and dirty, and people don't clean it up. All our visitors walk right in those doors, and the first thing they see is all the trash they leave, and that's something we could do without."

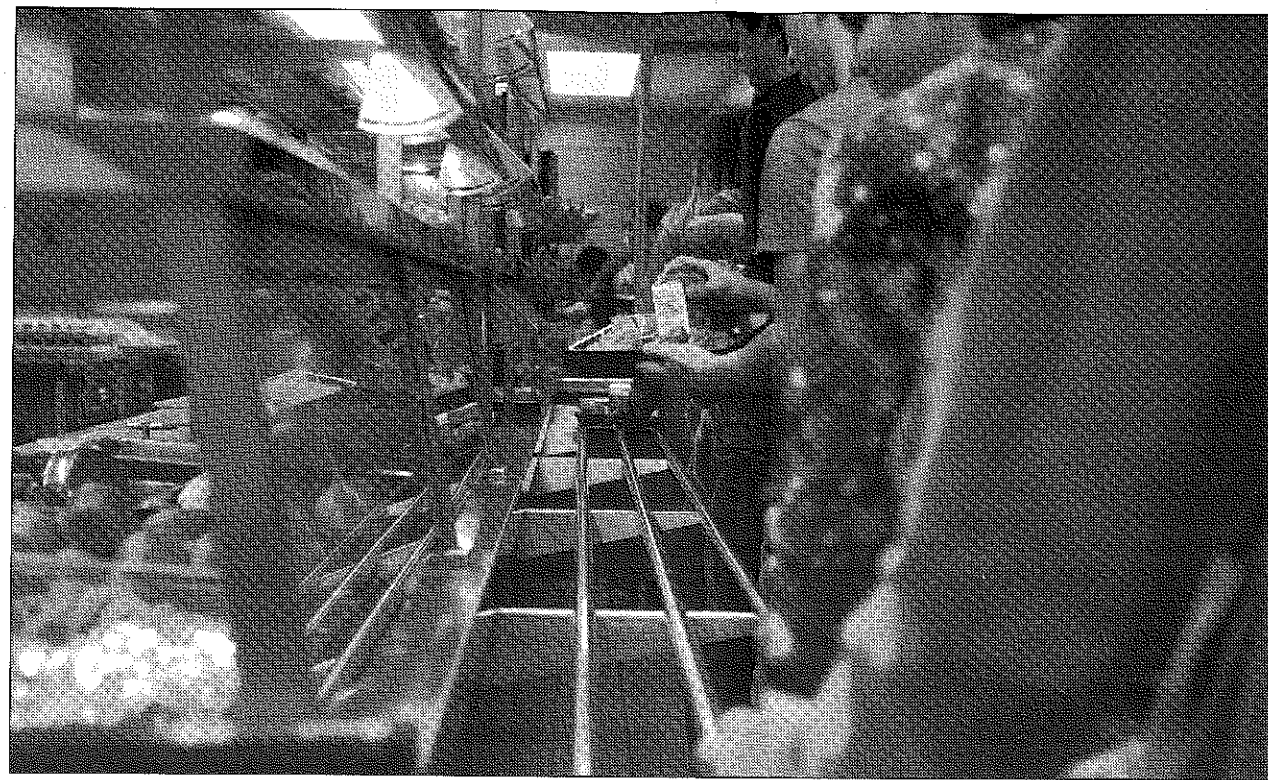
Even with the addition of a third lunch, junior Jasmine Bruce doesn't see a change in the time waiting in the lunch line.

"There's this one kid in my class after lunch who shows up late every day because he refuses to come to class until his food is finished," Bruce said. "Yes, [there's a better solution]. Extending lunch by even 10 minutes would really work better."

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that students get at least 20 minutes to sit down and eat lunch—excluding time waiting in line or walking from class to the cafeteria.

"Lunch should be a break, it shouldn't be a rush, rush, rush, then go back to class," yearbook teacher Brook Hampton said. "It should be nice."

Bruce believes that the school is only complicating matters by adding new routines.



Students work their way through a lunch line in the cafeteria. Long lunch lines led to the creation of a third lunch period in November. This is the first time PHS has had three lunches since the 2006-2007 school year, according to Principal Kirk Wrinkle. "The jury is still out on the third lunch," Wrinkle said. "We're going to have to reflect on it throughout the year and see how it works, see if it remains a beneficial thing. We want to make sure our absenteeism doesn't increase." Photo provided by Mercedes Ezeji

"The solutions that [the school] came up with are causing more problems," Bruce said. "Teachers don't get their lessons done in the amount of time they want to because they have to split [2nd period] into two sections. They think it's going to work, but it's not working the way they want it to. There's still not that much time for people to eat."

History teacher Stephanie Richardson is one of several teachers affected by the new lunch period, which splits her 2nd period class into two 45-minute segments. Richardson has no complaints about the new lunch period, and its impact on her class, thus far.

"The only time I think it would affect us is during testing

time," Richardson said. "I'm kind of leery of kids talking about the test or trying to get the answers during [lunch]. But other than that, it's working pretty well for me."

Hampton, another affected teacher, has mixed feelings about the new lunch period.

"It's a nice break," Hampton said. "You get in, you get started, you learn a couple things, and then you get a nice 30-minute break and you come back and you can do something new. "But it can cause a challenge because sometimes you've got your momentum going and everyone's finally on track, and doing what they're supposed to be doing, and then the bell rings and everybody leaves."

Wrinkle's main concern about the new lunch period is that it could make it easier for students to skip the second half of their 2nd period class. To combat this concern, teachers can now take attendance before and after the new 2nd lunch.

"The jury is still out on the [new] lunch," Wrinkle said. "We're going to have to reflect on it throughout the year and see how it works, see if it remains a beneficial thing. We want to make sure our absenteeism doesn't increase during 2nd period. The split lunch encourages kids to go to the first half of class, go off campus for lunch, and never come back."

Out of 175 students surveyed, 58 percent are unhappy with the addition of a new lunch period.

"I know that it hasn't been everybody's favorite thing," Brown said. "Some students told me, 'Ms. Brown, why can't I be back in the lunch I had. I'm not with my friends right now.' I hope people will realize that the first thing we have to maintain in a building that has a lot of people in it that we're responsible for is to make sure that we're safe. And that everybody gets their needs met. We weren't doing that effectively before, and I feel like we're doing a much more efficient job of that now."



Students purchase their meal during the new lunch period. Out of 175 students surveyed, 58 percent are unhappy with the addition of a third lunch period. Photo provided by Mercedes Ezeji