

# Solving the lunch crunch

*Third lunch period aims to solve overcrowding, high energy*

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FEATURE EDITOR

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 PfISD 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."

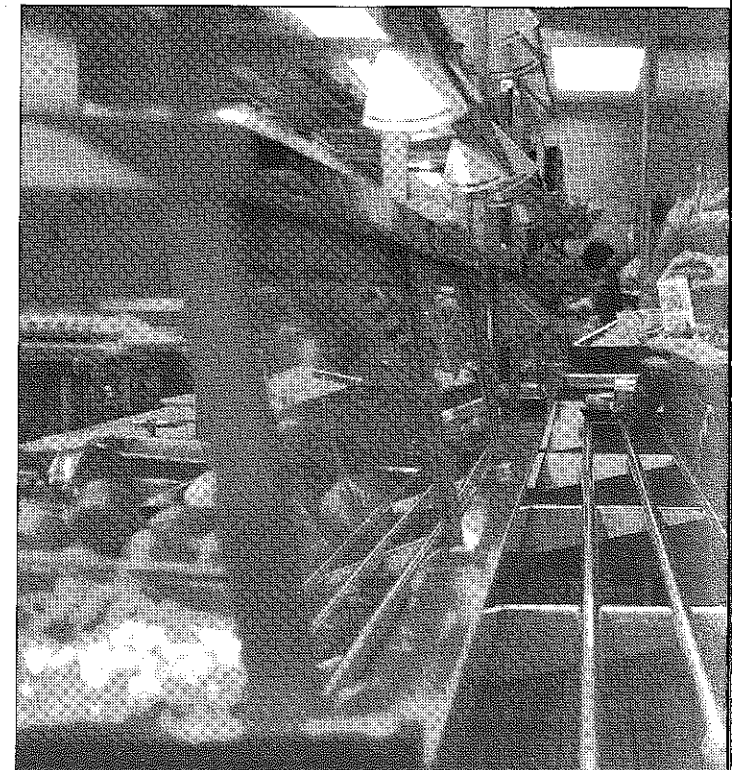
Even with the addition of a third lunch, junior Jasmine Bruce doesn't see a change in the time waiting in the lunch line.

"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 were a problem in November. This is the first time PHS has had three lunches since the 2006-2007 school year. "The jury is still out on the third lunch," Wrinkle said. "We're going to have to see if it remains a beneficial thing. We want to make sure our absenteeism doesn't go up."

"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



—Art by Gia Buttiglione

## Students' solution to overcrowded cafeteria:

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Among students, a widely proposed solution to overcrowding in the cafeteria is to allow both juniors and seniors to go off campus for lunch. District policy states that only seniors are allowed off campus. Of 175 students surveyed, 88 percent believe that juniors should also be allowed off campus.

"If we're responsible enough to drive cars, then we should be able to walk to the strip," junior Huong Pham said. "And maybe we should have longer lunches so that people who do stay have more time to go through the lines."

Pham isn't the only student who feels this way.

"At least let juniors go off campus, so that way you have something to look for-

ward to junior year," junior Alyssa San Miguel said. "A little bit of freedom."

The district policy doesn't always deter underclassmen. Out of 175 students surveyed, 62 percent have gone off campus for lunch, and 5 percent said they have been caught going off campus. Administrators have made more of an effort this year to stop students from sneaking off campus.

Assistant principal Laura Brown, a 1996 PHS grad, went off campus for lunch back when she was in school. She understands why it was a popular policy, but she understands why it was changed.

"I think that off campus lunch is a perfect idea if you have enough time to get in vehicles, walk, get somewhere in



h lines led to the creation of a third lunch period in No-007 school year, according to Principal Kirk Wrinkle. "The reflect on it throughout the year and see how it works, im doesn't increase." Photo provided by Mercedes Ezeji

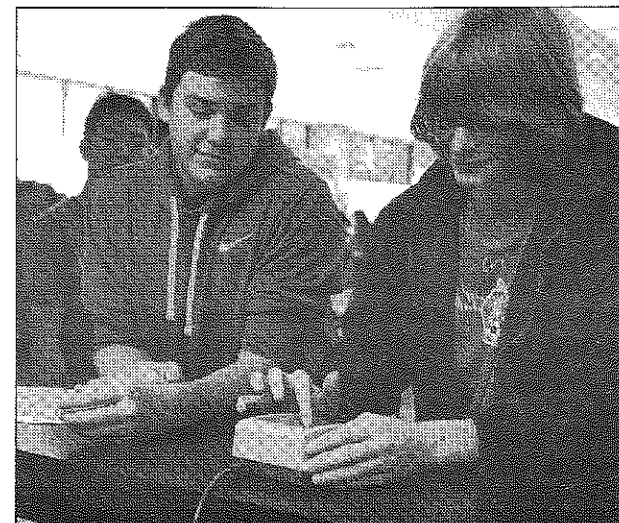
Richardson said. "I'm kind of leery of kids talking the test or trying to get the answers during [lunch]. her than that, it's working pretty well for me." mpton, another affected teacher, has mixed feelings the new lunch period. s a nice break," Hampton said. "You get in, you get l, you learn a couple things, and then you get a nice nute break and you come back and you can do some- new. "But it can cause a challenge because sometimes got your momentum going and everyone's finally on and doing what they're supposed to be doing, and he 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 by Sara Herrera

## Let juniors go off campus

"You need to give them that men from going off campus. off campus as an underclass- ing off campus. Teachers and prevent underclassmen from

said all students were allowed e couldn't recall when the dis- as changed. ou can provide students with a safe manner and get back,"

Brown said. "But the truth of the matter is that if we put a bunch of inexperienced drivers behind the wheel in a very short amount of time and ask you to get some- where and back quickly when you have a lot of friends in your car, kids don't make good decisions. The whole thing can very quickly become something very unsafe."

Principal Kirk Wrinkle agrees that allowing underclassmen off campus would be unsafe.

"I think once you start allowing more than the seniors off campus, you have traf- fic issues," Wrinkle said. "You have kids trying to get out, you have kids trying to get back. And you end up with more kids tardy or just not coming back [to school]. I think seniors need to have a reward for being a senior, and they do get perks for being seniors. And I don't see anything wrong with that because they've been here longer."

## Q&A with Geoff Holle, Aramark's District Manager and Food Service Director

### How has the third lunch at PHS affected food service?

We had been proposing a third lunch to campus administration for at least two or three years. There was such a huge gap between the first and second lunch, and we had staff here already, it made the transition pretty easy. We're not through though. We're adding serving lines. We've got concepts that are coming. We've also proposed a food trailer. For right now, that's on hold. But we've got a couple other ideas that we're looking at to make sure we can address the needs of campus growth.

### What would the food trailer entail?

The food trailer that we currently have is at Hendrickson High School. It's made-to-order, very much like Chipotle. It's Latin-themed food, street tacos, bowls, big burritos. We will be opening up a similar concept in January at Connally High School. For Pflugerville, [a food trailer] was one of the options we presented when we had some solutions earlier in the fall to deal with meal growth and campus growth. For right now, that's on hold. But as the campus grows and as participation increases, it will probably be revisited.

### Can you tell us about the proposed grab-and-go station by the vending machines?

This month, the school board will vote on adding what Aramark is calling a POD-Provisions on Demand. That's a college dining concept that we've seen at colleges nationwide. Pflugerville will be offering our POD wall unit, which will replace a partial area where the vending currently is right outside the cafeteria doors. It will be grab-and-go selection to make it easy for stu- dents who don't necessarily want to go into the cafeteria or just want to be able to grab something and go to wherever their destination is. In addition to that, we've also noticed that several students use that area for seating, so it just made sense to suggest bistro tables and chairs for them to sit around the pillars in that area.

## Statistics from the U.S.D.A.'s 2012 national school nutrition and dietary assessment

- For all schools levels (elementary, middle, and high), lunch periods last an average of 31 minutes (21 to 41), with students waiting an average of five minutes in line.
- 19 percent of high schools have open campuses (students can leave school grounds on lunch). 84 percent of these schools were located near supermarkets and convenience stores, and 75 percent where near fast food restaurants.
- The most common start time for the first lunch period for all school levels is 11 am, and the most common start for the last lunch period was 12:15 p.m. Of all schools surveyed, the earliest lunch started at 8:58 am, and the latest lunch started at 2:22 p.m.
- 30 percent of high schools do not require students to go to the cafeteria or food service area during a lunch period.