



The High School View

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Long lunch lines trouble some

By EmmaJean Holley



PHOTO BY DYLAN BROCKMEYER

Each day students in all five lunches queue up to pay for lunch in the new line system in the cafeteria.

The new cafeteria lunch line, created to reduce theft, with one entrance and one exit for students and faculty wishing to purchase food, has for some lunches caused diners to stand in line waiting for most of the 20 minutes they should have to eat.

"The vast majority of students were doing the right thing. Only a few students were guilty of stealing, and they were dealt with on an individual basis in my office," said Andrew Berry, assistant principal. "Often times, it was inadvertent.

They didn't mean to steal something but the system was unclear. Now, I think we've improved it so that there is more clarity in the whole process."

The new cafeteria layout, in addition to eliminating theft, aims to improve clarity and efficiency while better displaying the meal options to students.

"I've been doing a lot of work to make the school lunches better and healthier, and I know the people in the cafeteria have been working hard as well. This new lay-

out is better because the first thing you see when you walk in is a balanced meal being offered – much better than immediately seeing pizza. I think it's going to allow our kids to make healthier choices in the lunch line," said Linda Leonard, school nurse.

"I did not make the decision regarding this new system, but I do think it's going to work out to be better than the previous one," said assistant principal Matthew Malowski. "In the previous system, there were a lot of people congested in the middle of the cafeteria. Now, they're just congested in the halls. The congestion has moved, but I don't think there is more of it."

Some find flaws within the time constraints imposed by the new system.

"Twenty minutes isn't enough time to eat lunch already, but now I only have five minutes. How am I supposed to do that? It takes longer to stand in line, get my food, and pay than it does to actually eat

it," said senior Celia Mercier.

History teacher Corrine Kurtz said, "I have kids coming back to class five or ten minutes late because they didn't have time to finish eating before the bell rang, and what am I supposed to do? I don't want to penalize kids for needing more than five minutes to eat their lunch." "I have to choose between eating and talking. If I want to finish my lunch, I can't talk to my friends. Lunch should be a time where you can socialize, not a time where kids have to silently shovel food in their mouths so they can get enough to eat," said senior Jesse Thomas.

Such complaints could potentially reduce with time as students adjust to the revised process, according to Mr. Malowski. "I know that, anecdotally speaking, people are saying they have less time to eat lunch," he said. "But it's too soon really know for sure how efficient this system is in comparison with the previous one. I think we won't know until the transition period works itself out. Once everyone is more used to it, I think it will work out to be more efficient."

Senior Haley Hewson said, "This seems like a case of everyone being punished for a few people's actions. Obviously, stealing is wrong and theft is a big deal, but this new system inconveniences everyone. It's annoying and confusing and it takes away from valuable time. If they're going to do this then they should lengthen lunch."

Ms. Kurtz agreed. "Obviously, I can't speak for everyone, but I wouldn't have a problem with a slightly lengthened school day if it meant adjusting the lunch schedule to something more efficient. I think it's an important time," she said.

However, the implications of such a proposal are far-reaching. "Lengthening lunch would most likely mean lengthening the school day," said Mr. Berry. "That would require huge adjustments. We'd have to re-negotiate teacher contracts and re-work the entire bus system for the elementary schools, for starters. There would be a lot."

Theft, the core catalyst for stimulating the new system, remains another point of conflict.

"It's very early. But I think we'll see a lot less stealing than we did," said Mr. Berry.

"It's actually easier to steal that bag of chips now," said Forrest D'Olympia, junior. "Before, you didn't have a reason to be standing there by the shelf. Now, you can be standing at the salad dressing bar and just take the chips from right behind the lunch lady's back."

"It's a band-aid measure for sure," said history teacher Olsen Houghton. "They're trying to fix what is a serious problem, but I don't know that this is the ultimate solution. It's not perfect by any means. We should work to find a more permanent answer to the problem of theft, one that keeps people happier."

Making the wheels go round

By Anna Yukevich and EmmaJean Holley

Colored labels and schedules make up a small, but organized office, nestled between the culinary and science departments at the regional high school. This room, home to Transportation Manager Jimmy Flynn, is where all the planning happens to make sure that the 30 school bus drivers are able to drive island children to school and then home safely each weekday.

Mr. Flynn is in charge of organizing the routes both on- and off-island for all island schools. He has been in the bus business for 28 years, but started at the high school seven years ago. The trips the department organizes include routes to and from schools for island students, field trips, athletic trips, music trips, and more.

"My job is one big puzzle," Mr. Flynn said.

In the 2010-2011 school year,

1,071 bus runs were made on-island, and 93 were made off-island. This does not include trips for sports or the Edgartown School's routes. [The Edgartown School just joined the transportation system.]

"A lot of people might not realize how complex it is to coordinate the times and the routes," said George Gamble, bus driver for the downtown Vineyard Haven route. "It's not really a straightforward process. A lot of time is spent coordinating all of this."

"The bus drivers are amazing," said Mr. Flynn. They make me look good. We're all like family."

Wendy Briggs and Bill Belcher also work in the transportation office coordinating on and off-island field trips. They are also the drivers and coordinators for the special needs students on the island.

"All of the special needs students are our highest priority," said Ms. Briggs. "As drivers, it's our job to

get them to and from school safely. We have around 40 special needs students from all over the island that attend all of the island's schools. It can be a challenge to coordinate the most efficient routes and times, but we do it."

Bus drivers also have to coordinate their passengers.

Michael Miskiv, a driver for the transportation department, said, "For a lot of little kids, it can be hard for them to understand why it's so important to stay in your seat. There are a lot of rules on the bus, but they're all for safety. It can be hard to get that across sometimes. I don't like being the bad guy, but it's my responsibility



PHOTO BY CHARLOTTE HALL

Jimmy Flynn, (far right) and the bus drivers prepare to meet students in the parking lot as they exit the high school at day's end to get on the busses and head home.

to keep these kids out of danger."

"The job has taught me patience, flexibility, and determination," said Mr. Belcher.

"It can be intense sometimes," said Ms. Briggs. "Some of the kids have individual challenges that I need to be aware of and address. But the good outweighs the bad, and the positive atmosphere in the

transportation office keeps me coming back. It's very rewarding work."

Mr. Flynn noted that a bus driver's purpose extends beyond navigating the wheel. He said, "The bus driver is the first person a kid sees in the morning, and the last a kid sees at night. That means a lot to me."