

Proposed Plan to Phase Out Chocolate Milk from School Lunch Program, SY 2017-18

I. Introduction

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is committed to creating environments that foster and promote healthy eating habits for students. In April of 2015, the Board of Education passed the New Wellness Policy, which promised to explore phasing out chocolate milk as one approach to reduce students' intake of added sugar. This proposal details the process and results of a pilot conducted by Student Nutrition Services (SNS), the lessons learned from other school districts, and recommendations for phasing out chocolate milk district-wide.

Chocolate milk has the same key nutrients as regular milk, plus added sugar and flavorings. Health and nutrition experts, including the World Health Organization, American Heart Association, and American Academy of Pediatrics all recommend a drastic reduction in added sugars for long-term health. Added sugar is strongly linked to the development of dental caries, diabetes, heart disease, and obesity^{1, 2, 3}. Children and teens aged 2-18 years old typically consume three times the recommended amount of 6 teaspoons per day, mostly from sugar-sweetened beverages, cookies, and other processed foods². While the American Academy of Pediatrics cautions against eliminating chocolate milk because it may result in reduced total milk consumption¹, it is important to consider all strategies to reduce added sugar in students' diets. SFUSD supports the health and wellness of SFUSD students, and understands that it is critical that multiple approaches be employed to collaboratively reduce added sugars.

For a number of years, SNS has taken a holistic approach to reducing total added sugar from meal programs. Since the debut of the supper program in school year

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics (2015). Snacks, sweetened beverages, added sugars, and schools. *Pediatrics*, (135) 3. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2014-3902

² Vos, Miriam B. et al (2016). *Added Sugars and Cardiovascular Disease Risk in Children*. A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2016;CIR.000000000000439, originally published August 22, 2016
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1161/CIR.000000000000439>

³ World Health Organization (2015). *Sugars Intake for Adults and Children*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/guidelines/sugars_intake/en/

2013-14, only white milk was offered. During 2015, the Summer Meals program began offering white milk only. Beginning in school year 2015-16, SNS removed chocolate milk from breakfast service, and offered nonfat chocolate milk and 1% white milk during lunchtime. A la Carte sales of sugary beverages and snacks, such as Izze juice beverages and cookies were eliminated. SNS offers a variety of fresh fruits rather than juice in meal programs. Menus meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations, which limit added sugars to less than 10% of calories. Milk is a healthy choice and provides key nutrients, especially for young and growing children and adolescents. Because chocolate milk is a popular choice among students, SNS acknowledges the need to remove chocolate milk in a way that minimizes impact on overall milk consumption.

II. *Materials*

Community input was gathered using a variety of methods. Surveys were created for both students and families to gauge community readiness, assess students' current milk consumption habits, identify parent concerns, and answer what students would do if chocolate milk were removed. The plan was communicated to families via memos sent to schools. In order to create a truly student-centered plan, SNS invited 23 schools across all grade levels and from various and diverse neighborhoods to participate in the pilot. Students' milk consumption was not measured for this study; however, milk usage was gathered via Meal Production Records (MPR) and visual analysis of the amount of milk placed on the Sharing Table. Out of 23 schools, 5 chose to take part:

Elementary Schools:

Bret Harte & One Purpose
Mission Education Center
Redding Elementary
Jean Parker Elementary

Middle School:

Roosevelt Middle School

Figure 1: Communication and engagement strategies

School/Group	Bret Harte/One Purpose ES	Redding ES	Mission Ed Center ES	Jean Parker ES	Roosevelt MS	Burton HS	Galileo HS	¹ SAC	² SFA	Clarendon ES
Launch date	11/14/16	1/3/17	1/3/17	4/3/17	3/13/17					
Type of pilot	Eliminated	Fridays only	Fridays only	Eliminated	Eliminated					
Family survey		X								
Student survey		X				X	X	X	X	X
Family memo	X		X	X	X					

¹Student Advisory Council is abbreviated to SAC

² School Food Advisory is abbreviated to SFA

III. Methods

SNS worked closely with each pilot site and led a tailored communication and engagement plan for each school. For sites that surveyed families and/or students, the results were compiled and shared with each principal, who used the results to determine the frequency chocolate milk would be served at their school. Family memos were translated into multiple languages in order to reach as many families as possible. An SNS team member was present on the pilot launch date, and follow-up visits were conducted at least one month following the launch. MPR data was collected and analyzed for a two-week period before and after the pilot. Various staff were asked questions about their observations of student behavior and attitudes, and if they had noticed any changes in amount of milk either thrown away or placed on the share table.

IV. Observations and Data

SNS Observations:

During the first day at all participating schools, students asked for chocolate milk, inquired why it wasn't there, and were mildly annoyed that they only had two types of white milk to choose from. By the end of the first week at sites where chocolate milk was no longer served, students did not ask for it, and selected a white milk without any complaints. At the two sites where chocolate milk was served on Friday only, students continued to request chocolate milk.

There was not a noticeable increase in the amount of milk cartons on the Sharing Table at any site.

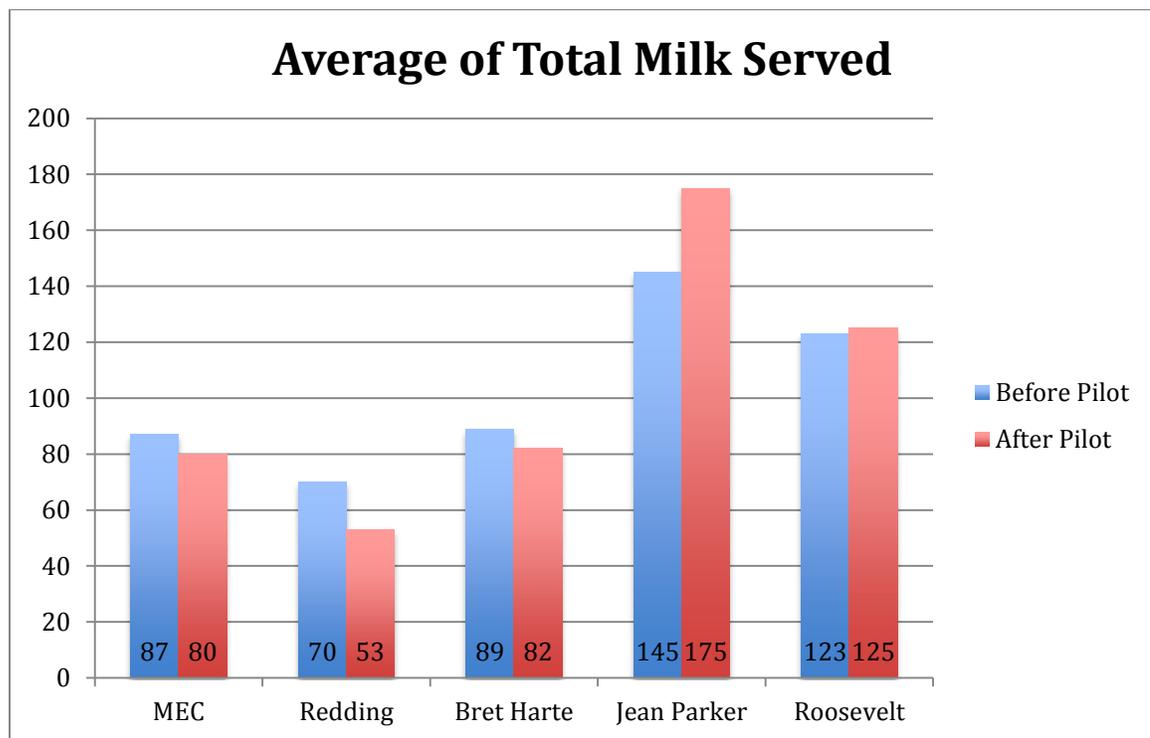
Some dining staff required that all students select milk, which led to some student frustration and caused milk to either end up wasted or placed on the Sharing Table.

Two types of milk must be offered at mealtimes, per USDA guidelines. However, at sites where chocolate milk was offered on Fridays only, there was a higher chance of non-compliance. This happened for a variety of reasons: milk delivery drivers mistakenly delivered only one type of milk; it was not clear to all dining staff that they always had to offer two types of milk; the launch date was not clear to all dining staff. These issues were not observed at sites where chocolate milk was eliminated.

Meal Production Record Data:

Dining staff must complete an MPR for every meal served. While this does not necessarily indicate how much milk students actually consumed, it does provide a picture of how many students selected milk during meal periods.

Figure 2: MPR Data 2 weeks before and after pilot



Survey Feedback:

Forty-six total families completed the survey, and the majority of respondents supported either eliminating or reducing the frequency chocolate milk is served. While some voiced concern that students would stop drinking milk altogether, most expressed that chocolate milk is not offered at home, and it should not be offered at school. Over 80% said that their child would just switch to white milk.

A total of 392 students were surveyed across all grade levels. The majority of students at all levels reported that they currently prefer to drink chocolate milk during lunch at school, but if it were not available, they would switch to white milk. High school students felt that it was important to understand the reasoning behind eliminating chocolate milk, and also wanted to be offered palatable beverage alternatives. They also reported that many students turn to chocolate milk as a healthier sweet drink, and that if the option is removed, students will go off-campus to purchase sugary beverages.

Figure 3: Survey results

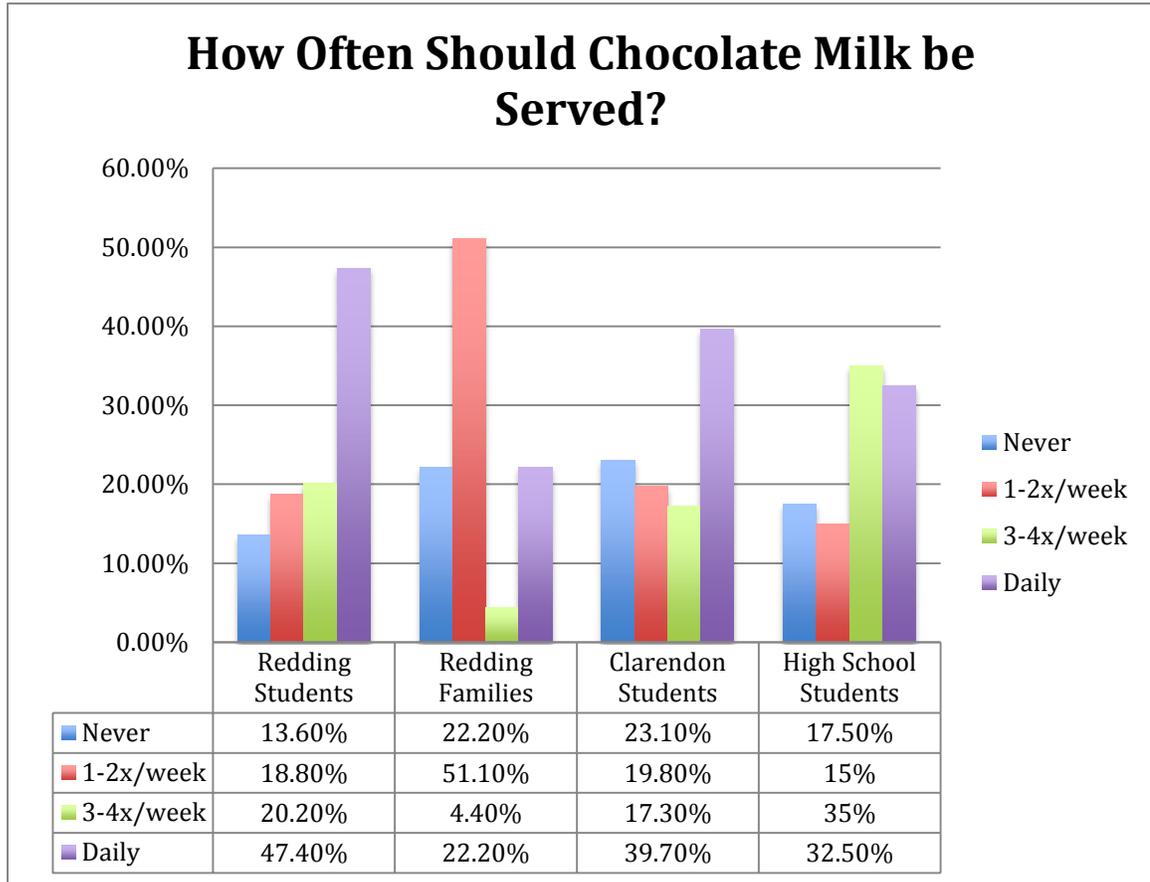


Table 1: Reported student behavior if chocolate milk was not a beverage option

Group Surveyed	Would switch to white milk	Would not drink milk at all, but would still eat school lunch	Would not eat school lunch	Other
Redding Students	71.40%	18%	10.70%	
Redding Families	83.70%	9.30%		7%
Clarendon Students	65.10%	25.70%	9.20%	
High School Students	50%	17.50%	12.50%	20%

Teacher and Staff Feedback:

Various staff shared their observations and feedback about the pilot. Teachers, dining staff, and principals reported that students did not ask for chocolate milk, nor did they think removing or reducing chocolate milk had negatively impacted students. At sites where chocolate milk was offered on Fridays, dining staff reported that students continued to ask for chocolate milk. Custodians reported that they did not notice any changes in the amount of milk that was being thrown away or placed on the Sharing Table.

IV. Lessons Learned from Other School Districts

SNS reached out to other school districts that have successfully removed chocolate milk in order to learn best practices: Minneapolis Public Schools, Boulder Valley Public Schools, Los Angeles Unified School District, and Berkeley Unified School District. There were similarities between all of the districts: there was a push to reduce added sugar from menus and eliminating chocolate milk was a natural step; there was not a widespread communication campaign; chocolate milk was removed entirely at the beginning of the school year; there was minor pushback from the community, but it dissipated quickly. Two unique perspectives came from Boulder Valley Public Schools Director, Ann Cooper, and former Minneapolis Public Schools Registered Dietitian, Nicole Barron.

Boulder Valley Public Schools switched from conventional, single serving cartons to organic, bulk, self-service milk while at the same time eliminating chocolate milk. They leveraged this opportunity to emphasize the positive changes they were making rather than pointing out what had been taken away. Cooper felt this approach was very effective, and that any more communication about the decision to eliminate chocolate milk would have caused issues.

Minneapolis Public Schools reported that eliminating chocolate milk from the lunch program was the final stage in a long process to reduce overall sugar intake. It had slowly been removed from other offerings, such as during breakfast and as part of field-trip meals. They collected milk-purchasing data and found that 15% less milk was purchased after eliminating chocolate milk, but meal participation was not affected. Barron reported that the main publicity surrounding the decision to eliminate chocolate milk came from the Dairy Council.

V. *Recommendations and Considerations*

Key Recommendations:

- Education and communication to all stakeholders is critical.
- Explore beverage alternatives for high school level.
- Eliminate chocolate milk entirely rather than offering it on selected days in order to improve compliance and ease of operation.

SNS Training:

- Reinforce Offer Versus Serve with dining staff.
- Implement Smarter Lunchroom concepts to make white milk more appealing.

Figure 3: Proposed timeline

Before SY 2017-18	Semester 1	Semester 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread communication • Training provided for SNS dining staff • Contact milk vendor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate chocolate milk from elementary and middle school level lunch program • Targeted outreach at high schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate chocolate milk from high school lunch program

Communication Strategy:

Principals: FAQ and memo explaining the results of this report and provide background about the decision. Give principals and schools the resources to answer any questions or concerns that may arise from families or outside community.

Families: Focus on educational resources about sugary beverages and added sugar. Post information online about the report and, reassure families that this decision does not affect the foods or beverages they pack for their child.

Students: Targeted outreach about sugary beverages and added sugar in general. Provide education about benefits of drinking milk. Collaborate with multiple departments and partners including School Health Programs, Wellness Centers, Community Health Outreach Workers, Nutrition Outreach Workers, and Cooperative Extension to reach all high schools.

SFUSD community: Send a media update prior to start of school. Create a flyer for SNS dining staff to post in cafeteria space, on BeWell webpage, and distribute via WAD.