

Lincoln 'flexes' its breakfast muscle for students

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The baker starts at 5:30 in the morning. The manager is on the clock by 6. By 10:30 a.m. they've served over 400 children. And that's before the lunch crew rolls in.

"We can get them in and out in under five minutes," said Tracy Peterson. She leads the cafeteria staff at Lincoln Middle School and she's just finished a Flex rush.

Students at Lincoln have the opportunity to use a flex period to catch up on school work, seek extra help or take part in an elective period. Or, they can eat breakfast. Before the breakfast option was instituted, Peterson and her team served just over 100 students at an earlier scheduled breakfast. Now, they routinely see 300 flood in with their blue and yellow tickets at 10 a.m. looking for cheese rolls (the number one seller) and biscuits and gravy (a close second).

"You can really see a difference," said Lincoln Vice Principal Emily Wren. "Some kids don't eat breakfast because it's too early but now they have that chance," she said.

Flex time is the only time visitors may see students roam-

ing the halls, food and drink in hand. What was once a standard no-no, for fear of increasing janitorial workloads, is now a welcomed sign. It means students are going to class; fed.

"The blue tickets, those kids go first," said councilor Tom Partridge, pointing out the lucky few jumping the line and appearing on the other side with a coveted cheese roll.

Blue slips are an easy way for staff to determine which students should be sitting in the cafeteria enjoying their breakfast and which students should be taking advantage of the one-time free pass to carry food in the hallways—on their way back to class.

"If a student has been requested by a teacher, maybe they missed an assignment or the teacher thinks they need extra time in that subject, they'll be given a blue slip," Partridge said. "And that means they can get their food and go." However, because middle schoolers will be middle schoolers, it doesn't always work that way. Often, staff may find a blue ticket holder at the back of the long line, trying to buy a precious few free moments.

"Because teachers know how quickly the blue slips are al-

lowed to go through the line, if a student is five or 10 minutes late to class, they know they were at the back of the line," Partridge said. "And they're not allowed to come back. Not forever, just a few days, maybe."

The consequence is a deterrent but in a school that has a poverty rate that hovers between 60 and 70 percent, it's not one staff likes to dole out very often. In fact, Partridge is attempting to include more time for students to partake in the second breakfast period.

Currently, Lincoln has flex breakfast Tuesday through Friday. However, for students who many not eat well over the weekend, a lack of Monday morning flex breakfast can sting.

"I'm trying to convince them to steal a few minutes from here and there," Partridge said.

For kids who do take advantage of the flex time, the meal is a good one. Peterson's staff bakes its goods fresh every morning and for them, it's about the kids.

"I'm surprised more of the free kids don't take advantage," she said. "That would be my goal. Is to see more of the free kids eating. But what we do, this is for the kids."



Lincoln Middle School is feeding 400 children before lunch thanks to a new Flex program that allows for a second breakfast period and a the opportunity for students to bring their food to classes they may need extra help in.

Wyden Continued from A1

Act. Questions ranged from whether Wyden would commit to fighting the effort to pass the House's health care bill now that it was headed to the Senate to requesting the senator confirm he would support a single-payer system.

"I respect Senator Sanders and I will take a look at his bill," Wyden said, noting that he hadn't seen the proposed legislation has of yet.

He also expressed his doubt that a single-payer bill would make its way through the republican controlled Congress.

"We can either try to get a bill passed Donald Trump, Paul Ryan and Mitch McConnell or residents in Oregon, a progressive state can walk out of this hall right now and contact their representatives and let them know they want to use what I wrote to do it right now," Wyden said.

Other questions posed to the senator included the 'Know before you go' movement that would allow college-bound kids to see graduation rates and student loan averages before choosing a college and the ongoing investigation into Russia. He noted, "As long as I'm your man on Russia, this investigation will not be swept under the rug."

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