

USDA's School Kitchen Grants Benefit Meal Programs and Students

Zamorano Elementary School

San Diego

This fact sheet is part of a series exploring the effects of kitchen equipment grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture on students and meal programs around the country. For more school case studies and the companion issue brief, please visit www.pewtrusts.org/school-kitchen-grants.

The San Diego Unified School District reflects its city's reputation as a growing technology hub. The district boasts innovative public outreach and communications, including promotion of its school meal program via an app¹ and a social media presence. But in the kitchens, the program was stuck in the 20th-century "heat and serve" era due to lack of funding for updates.

The district's Zamorano Elementary School has almost 1,300 students, 72 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced-priced meals, but its outdated kitchen equipment affected many more children than that. For nine months, the school also produced meals for nearby schools whose food service facilities were being renovated. To do more "scratch" cooking, Zamorano applied for and received a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant to purchase a combi oven that prepares items in safer, more efficient ways.

"Many students in this district depend on our meals to make it through the day," said Gary Petill, school nutrition director. "The new combi oven is a great asset in helping us provide them with the good quality, delicious food."

Zamorano Elementary School Kitchen Upgrades at a Glance

Grades	K-5
Enrollment	1,296
Free and reduced-price meal eligibility	72%
FY 2013 funding awarded	\$20,000
Equipment received	Combi oven
District	San Diego Unified School District

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics data for SY 2013-14 and California Department of Education

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Before the upgrade, cooking was slow and unreliable. With the combi oven, Zamorano's kitchen staff can quickly and safely prepare fresh produce and raw meats, such as the locally sourced chicken that is bought in bulk together with neighboring districts. In just 30 minutes, 500 chicken wings, breasts, and drumsticks can be perfectly cooked, and the staff can be sure that each batch will feature the same high nutritional quality and be

delicious. Broccoli, which took 12 minutes in a steamer, now needs just two minutes of steaming in the combi oven. The more efficient equipment has reduced preparation time and freed staff to devote more of the day to developing new recipes and procedures.

“Our new combi oven can do an amazing number of tasks,” said Petill. “This equipment provides us with the technology we need to produce fresh and delicious food that is overwhelmingly popular with the students.”


The district also offers students many opportunities to learn about healthy eating, the most important being a daily lesson from the cafeteria about how a nutritious meal looks. The meal program participates in California Thursdays² and farm-to-school purchasing, serves breakfast at 65 school and child care sites, and operates a robust Summer Food Service program. The new combi oven vastly improved Zamorano’s ability to participate in these programs, which is another testament to its reach.

Endnotes

- 1 “YumYummi,” an app for mobile devices, provides menus, ingredients, allergens, and nutrition information.
- 2 California Thursdays is an innovative program of the Center for Ecoliteracy that features school lunch one day a week serving only California-raised food prepared fresh in the district.

For further information, please visit:
pewtrusts.org/school-kitchen-grants

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The Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project, a collaboration between The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, provides nonpartisan analysis and evidence-based recommendations to make sure that all foods and beverages sold in U.S. schools are safe and healthful.