



# Hermosa Beach

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## Parent committee brings healthier pizza pilot program to schools



About 20 mothers are pushing for healthier lunches at Hermosa Beach schools. This month, they created a pilot program to supply students with Fresh Brothers instead of Dominos on pizza Fridays. Above, students Marcus Garcia (from left), Juliet Persell, Brody Miller and Chase Persell grab a slice. *photos by Tiffani Miller*

by Alana Garrigues

This month, the Hermosa Beach City School District has been running a pilot program, replacing Dominos with Fresh Brothers for pizza Fridays at Hermosa View and Valley schools. It's the first step in what many parents hope will translate to a permanent vendor relationship with the local chain, noted throughout the region for its handmade dough and fresh ingredients. And then, they hope, a stepping stone to healthier options throughout the week.

Gail Laskowski, Tiffani Miller and Tara Hackley are three of about 20 moms who formed an ad hoc food committee in the fall of 2013, advocating lunch options that exceed national lunch standards and delve more deeply into the quality of ingredients rather than nutritional content and data.

Hackley compared current food service to a 'C' grade, a passing grade to meet the food standard requirements, but not something the district or families should necessarily strive toward.

While the lunches meet national standards for calories, proteins, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, parents argue sta-

tistics don't tell the whole story. They say while canned peaches and juice count as fruit, they're not the same as a Cutie orange or a bag of carrots.

The moms saw a disconnect between the lunches served—frozen cheeseburgers cooked in individual bags, corn chips with a creamy cheese and jalapeno dip in a can—compared to the Hermosa Beach community's commitment to healthy lifestyles and the Beach Cities Health District curriculum that nutrition docents bring to the classrooms.

"I feel like the community is on board; you can see a change in Hermosa Beach

with the types of restaurants coming in ... so if the community's doing it, and we're teaching it in our schools ... it all needs to be connected," said Laskowski, who spoke to the school board about the pilot program on Jan. 14.

To start, the committee worked with school administrators to identify the busiest lunch day. Pizza Fridays historically tended to sell double to triple the average number of lunches sold on other days of the week, according to district records, so changing the pizza was a way to impact the greatest number of students.



Chloe Persell enjoys her Fresh Brothers pizza that is part of a pilot program to introduce healthier lunches - *photo by Tiffani Miller*

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Miller calls on all parents to support the food committee by educating them-selves about nutrition, telling the board and administrators that they would support a change in vendors or lunch options, and buy into the pilot program.

A permanent switch to the lunch menu would likely increase the cost for a district that does not make money on its lunches.

So, the moms surveyed parents last summer to see if there would be support to pay more for better food. The majority of families—79 percent—were in favor of paying more than the current \$3.50 for lunch if there were more options for students daily and fresher ingredients. She said 48 percent of the respondents said they elected not to buy lunch due to quality concerns.

Superintendent Pat Escalante said the district is listening. They've made strides in improving the quality of school lunches, offering prepackaged salads in addition to the salad bar, and they're looking at adding an option to buy water in follow ... because you realize, OK, it can be done."

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Board President Patti Ackerman said she likes the pilot program, adding that it stirred dinner conversation at home. Her older son, now out of HBCSD, was jealous that his younger brother got to eat Fresh Brothers at school.

"I think it's fantastic and it's a good step in the right direction," Ackerman said.

Escalante said the pilot program may be extended through February to collect adequate data and help them decide the next steps for the district.