

## Food Service in the Cherry Hill Public Schools 2021

### Myth vs. Facts

The Cherry Hill Board of Education and Administration understand there has been dissatisfaction among some of our students and their families with our food service this year. The food service challenges our school district faces are not unique to Cherry Hill – they are faced by school districts nationwide. As we work with Aramark, our food service provider, to address the challenges, we wanted to provide you with some information and solutions as we move forward.

**Myth: The District and Aramark are offering subpar food products in order to make a profit on the food service program.**

**Fact: This a great opportunity to introduce students who have not participated in the food service program in the past to try it out. Both the District and Aramark’s goal is to provide appealing, nutritious offerings that meet federal and school meal guidelines. Profits and financial gain are not even a consideration as the challenges of meeting this goal are being addressed.**

### ***What are those challenges, and how are they being addressed?***

- ***Food Product Supply Chain*** - Aramark is one of the top three largest food service program providers in the world, servicing more than 500 school districts and 2.5 million students across the country, which gives it tremendous buying power. Aramark works with top tier vendors such as General Mills, Kellogg’s, Tyson, Land of Lakes and Ken’s. Funding allocations through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in the form of discount assistance go directly to these vendors to purchase name brand products and fresh fruits and vegetables for the District. Despite this, currently as much as 30% of what is ordered to service the District is “unavailable” from these suppliers on a regular basis. Sometimes vendors will substitute alternate products, and sometimes the District must modify menu offerings
- ***Menu “Fatigue”*** – Prior to the pandemic, Aramark utilized a six-week menu cycle which means that meals were rotated through every six weeks. As the ~~new~~ current school year began, in an effort to focus on safety and the logistics of students returning to buildings, a simplified one-week menu cycle with cold, prepackaged items was implemented. As buildings have gotten into a rhythm and students have adjusted to eating in schools again, some hot items have been added to the menu. Starting in January 2022, Aramark will implement a two-week menu cycle to alleviate the repetition of the menus. The ultimate goal is to return to a six-week menu cycle as staffing and product availability allows.
- ***Increase in meals being served*** – The volume of food being distributed has more than doubled: In 2019, approximately 450 breakfasts and 3,000 lunches were

sold each day; in 2021, nearly 1,500 breakfasts and 5,500 lunches are served each day.

- **Staffing** – Aramark has not been immune to the lack of staffing being experienced by many retail outlets and restaurants. Food service staffing in the school buildings is at less than 50% of the level prior to the pandemic.
  - In the elementary schools – currently - 1 employee, typically 2 to 3.
  - In the middle schools – currently 3 employees, typically 6 to 8.
  - In the high schools – currently 5 employees, typically 12 to 14

If an elementary school employee does not report for work, a middle or high school employee is sent to that school.

**Little known fact:** Approximately 80% of the Aramark employees working in the District are Cherry Hill residents, many of whom have students in the District.

- **Recruitment** - Although Aramark recently raised the starting salary to \$14 per hour, they are currently competing with holiday retail hiring. They are using Facebook, Craig's List and other job websites to recruit as well as flyers on job boards in local grocery stores and are considering purchasing lawn signs.

In addition to the difficulty of finding employees to hire, the State mandated criminal background check process is taking longer than usual. It can take a potential employee up to two weeks to get a fingerprinting appointment and as long as six weeks to get their clearance. Any hiring done now in December results in employees starting work February or March.

Since August, Cherry Hill School District has regularly publicized the company's available jobs and their pay increase on District social media and in *CHPS WEEKLY*, the weekly District email sent each Friday to the CHPS community. [Employment applications are available through Aramark's online portal.](#)

**Myth: The District has control over the portion sizes and they aren't feeding the students enough food.**

**Fact: The portion sizes of breakfasts and lunches are determined by the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and Aramark must adhere to them.**

Portion sizes are based on caloric intake and designed to meet nutritional standards as required by the NSLP. As an example, in a school meal, a typical cheeseburger is a 3 ounce patty which is served on a 51% whole grain enriched bun. A typical fast food chain patty is 1.6 ounces.

Full nutritional information on meals can be found here: <https://chclc.nutrislice.com/>

**Myth: The District is offering free “food” and if a student wants a drink or just a slice of pizza, they should be able to get it.**

**Fact: The NSLP is offering free “meals” and the meal must meet certain requirements in order to be considered free.**

All meals served to students must have 5 components:

- Meat or Meat Alternative
- Grain
- Dairy
- Fruit
- Vegetable

Under the offer versus serve model, students must take 3 of the 5 components, one of which must be a fruit or a vegetable, in order for the meal to count as a free meal from the NSLP. This is why a student cannot just take a piece of pizza or a juice for free – only full meals are being offered for free, not individual components. The District also cannot offer multiple meals to one student as it is only authorized to offer one free breakfast and lunch meal per student per day.

**Myth: Posting pictures of burned hot dogs and moldy rolls on social media after the fact is an effective way to resolve issues.**

**Fact: The District and Aramark want students to have a satisfying meal experience. If there are any concerns about a student’s meal, students should let an adult know immediately.**

Addressing issues in the moment is crucial to helping us improve. As we have been challenged by the increased number of meals we serve and the decrease in our staffing, we ask for your patience as we continue to make improvements.