



## LITCHFIELD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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*"A Stronger Mind for a Stronger Future"*

October 28, 2021

### Litchfield Elementary School District Food Service Goes the Extra Mile for Hungry Students

Supply chain problems have been top-of-mind this fall for many Americans – from building contractors to restaurants of all types. For school nutrition programs across the country, there have been very serious challenges: late deliveries, no deliveries, substitutions, and mislabeled products, like cases of frozen blueberries instead of pizzas, even our paper goods like trays and trash bags! All of that in addition to staffing levels that have fallen to about 50%.

During this fall's many disruptions, Litchfield Food Service professionals have continued doing what they do best: Feeding kids well under difficult circumstances. They did it through months of emergency COVID meals served curbside in all types of weather and they are getting it done now. However, many school nutrition leaders believe that this year is more difficult than last because of supply and demand issues: More school meals are being served with fewer staff, as well as food, paper product, and equipment shortages.

There is good news: All K-12 students in the US are eligible for healthy school meals at no cost during SY 2021-22. Participation has risen substantially in our schools; we have seen over a 50% increase in participation compared to last year. Litchfield Food Service is dedicated to feeding as many students as possible, but, like many in food service, we are struggling to find people to do the work. Currently, all of our schools are operating with decreased staffing several of which with less than 50% of the staff necessary.

Preparing more meals – especially the scratch-made items that our students love – with fewer workers is a serious challenge by itself. Add on the fact that many items – including customer favorites like pizza and chicken strips – are in short supply and sometimes missing entirely from deliveries. Our Purchasing Agent works daily with both our food and supply vendors and our cooks to try and place orders as far in advance as possible to limit our substitutions. While we struggle to find enough workers due to the impact of COVID-19, those who are in the schools have gone above and way beyond to feed students since the beginning of the pandemic.

As we just celebrated National School Lunch Week in October, it's important to remember that Litchfield Food Service heroes go the extra mile every day: They will come work on a weekend and holiday to take a delivery that cannot wait until they return or check a freezer alarm to ensure the food we have does not spoil.

Rather than complaining about school lunch, take a few minutes to support school nutrition professionals recognizing that they are doing the best they can, with what they have, in very difficult situations. If you are in a school, take a few minutes to hand out meals at breakfast or to wipe down tables between classes in the cafeteria. A simple **thanks** can also do wonders. It doesn't have to be complicated or elaborate. Handmade cards from students are always in style. Thank you cards from USDA Team Nutrition are easy to download and send or print out at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/stronger-school-meals-educational-materials>

Thank you for your understanding,  
Chef Ronald L. Beck II, BS, SNS  
Director of Food Service

