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Headline: Stalled food supply chain cripples school cafeterias

Sub Headline: N/A

Short headline: Stalled food supply chain cripples school cafeterias

Abstract: Pandemic supply [change-chain](#) shortages rock school lunch menus, sending limited lunch staff scrambling nearly every time a delivery truck of food arrives missing items or with substitutions.

Dateline: WILLIAMSON COUNTY, Tenn. (WTVF)

Author: Claire Kopsky

Date: February 16, 2022

Edited Article:

Pandemic supply [change-chain](#) shortages rock school lunch menus sending limited lunch staff scrambling nearly every time a delivery truck of food arrives missing items or with substitutions.

In the wealthiest Tennessee county, Williamson County Schools said they have fought to put healthy meals together for two years.

"It's gotten worse and only is going to get worse," said Williamson County Schools Food Services Director James Remete, who said after talking with distributors he does not expect to see the shortages let up until at least October 2023.

"When the truck pulls up, we know what we ordered. But we don't know what's on the truck until it pulls up. And then at that point, then each school has to get a menu together and get it out there. We do a posted menu, but that menu is literally changed every day, by every school," said Remette

The school district previously received their groceries from Institutional Wholesale IWC in [Cookeville, Tennessee](#), but three weeks before the start of the 2022 fall semester, Remete received a phone call.

"Our main grocery provider called us to tell us that they would not be able to service us anymore, because of our size and the issues that they're having trying to get products in," he said. "Removing us from their equation allowed them to service about 10 other school districts. So we had to make a quick change with the new provider, and we moved over to Sysco out of Nashville."

"I talk with a lot of other school districts in Tennessee and across the country, we all kind of work together. And everybody's struggling," [said Remete who said he also collaborated with districts in](#)

~~Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California and Washington who are experiencing the same shortages.~~

Remete has also collaborated with districts in Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California and Washington who are experiencing the same shortages.

Williamson County Schools services 30,000 students in their cafeterias every day — a number the district had not seen until the federal COVID-19 relief fund offered free meals to students.

"We're ~~gonna going to~~ do the best we can. You know, we're, ~~you know~~, trying to get the food and all that is a bit of a struggle. So, we are going to make some mistakes here and there. And we ask that you bear with us. We'll always get them corrected. But again, our promise to our kids is that we're going to do our best that we can make sure there's a variety of food out there every single day," said Remete.

"Everybody receives a meal at no cost. That's across the country," ~~said Remete.~~ "So, when that was put into place, our participation has grown dramatically...It was part of the COVID relief on that part of it to make sure with everything else going on, at least at the at the school level, parents didn't have that extra burden."

But on top of the food shortage at a time when demand for meals is at an all-time high, food service programs like the one at Williamson County Schools are also seeing significant staffing shortages.

"We're short about 50 staff members," he said. "We normally run about 280 people, we have about 230 right now. Right now, this [middle] school where they normally have six today, they only have four, on some days they only have three. And the bell rings and kids still come down. You know, and so they have to be ready every day."

~~Remete said the~~The biggest challenges recently have been finding chicken products, miniature pizzas and serving plates.

"It's like every week something pops up, 'Oh, we can't get this oh, we can't get that,'" said Remete. "Our serving trays, that's a big challenge. We've gone from serving trays to find just round plates, to-go containers, cutting them in half to use as plates."

He said he has even made personal trips to local stores to try to bridge the gap when truckloads do not arrive as ordered but admits it is no small task buying for 30,000.

"We're trying to be very creative and think way outside the box, because we're forced. We have to do that right now."

Original text by reporter:

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