North Ridgeville City Schools — North Ridgeville, Ohio

QUICK STATS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner Since</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>School Buildings</th>
<th>Monthly Meals Served</th>
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</thead>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>4,376</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2,112</td>
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North Ridgeville’s Dining Program Achieves Turnaround Success—Satisfying Students, Parents and Staff

Some school dining programs experience a classic phenomenon: When students are unhappy with their dining experiences, the dining staff members are also unhappy with their jobs. Conversely, when students are happy, staff members are happy. North Ridgeville City Schools was trapped in the downside of this scenario until 2016 when the district decided to fix both problems with one solution—it hired Aramark as its dining program outsource partner. Since then, both student dining satisfaction and staff job satisfaction have been on an upward trajectory.

Before hiring Aramark, meals at the six schools were largely heat-and-serve entrees with little dining innovation. While there was a salad bar at the high school, service was minimal. “There wasn’t anything special for the students to get excited about, so the dining staff didn’t have anything to get excited about either,” said Food Service Director Kyle Suerth.

North Ridgeville decided it was time to disrupt the status quo and outsource its dining program to a professional firm. After interviewing several contenders, the district chose Aramark. Some of the key criteria were Aramark’s dining innovation and the quality of their culinary program including from-scratch preparation and local-sourcing options. The marketing programs and the company staffing program, including training and motivation, were also desirable components of the company’s bid.

“The North Ridgeville City School District partnered with Aramark and the changes and upgrades to the food services component of our District were noticed immediately. In addition to the professionalism of the Aramark staff, the commitment to providing quality meal offerings has been met with enthusiasm by the North Ridgeville staff and student population,” said Matt Yunker, Director of Operations of North Ridgeville City Schools.

In less than a year, Aramark helped North Ridgeville schools achieve a 180-degree improvement on both student participation in the dining program and staff job satisfaction. Meals at the high school alone have nearly doubled, from about 220 to 400 daily lunches, which is even more impressive when you consider that students with a 2.0 GPA or higher can opt out of school lunch. Students are making the choice to eat at school. Breakfast participation also improved, with the addition of simple, nutritional menu options.

What’s more, the students are speaking out about how much they love the new program. Feedback comes through Aramark’s annual ViewPOINT survey, small ongoing surveys, dining staff feedback and students’ direct feedback.

“One girl took me aside and told me, “Your pizza is my life,” said Suerth. “They are really enjoying and excited about our from-scratch pizza, sandwiches, and salads. They’re choosing them over either local fast food places or their homes. It’s really rewarding and satisfying for us.”
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Along with all of the new food innovations, Aramark also addressed staff training in a positive and proactive way. “We make sure that every employee is comfortable and confident in their roles through several sessions of high-quality hands-on training, including Aramark best practices, recipes and food safety standards,” said Suerth. “This not only helps build their confidence, but also their engagement in and excitement for the program.”

One concrete example is a staff member who had made salads for 10 years. Each day, she’d have about eight orders to fill. As a result, her enthusiasm for her job hit rock bottom. When she was put in charge of making sub sandwiches for students she found herself much busier, making an average of one-hundred subs a day.

She has experienced a renewed enthusiasm for her job. “She comes to work with a greater sense of purpose,” noted Suerth.

Rounding out Aramark’s 180-degree improvement of the North Ridgeville food and nutritional services program is a multi-pronged community outreach effort that has generated a high level of support. Community initiatives include participation in a healthy living program and a fun run.

“We’ve created a presence in the community to let them know we’re here and we’re promoting healthy living for them and their children,” said Suerth. “Our mission has been about engagement and innovation on every level—with our clients, our students and our staff. We are very pleased with our accomplishment in our first year, and looking forward to even more.”

## Challenges

### Lack of Innovation

Meals were mostly heat-and-serve without innovative dining concepts.

### Lack of Staff Enthusiasm

The dining staff was not excited about their jobs and merely went through the motions of serving daily meals.

### Lack of Community Involvement

Low involvement between the schools’ dining programs and the local community.

## Solutions and Results

### New Dining Options

Within months of partnering, Aramark brought new dining options to all schools. At the high school, it added food court style station brands, such as Green Street Deli, which includes a toaster oven and salad bar; Custom Bros Grill, which includes burgers and chicken sandwiches; Home Zone, which features meal promotions, entrées of the day and five rotating made-to-order bars; and Java City with grab-and-go wraps, salads, muffins, yogurt parfaits and a full coffee bar with iced coffee, hot coffee and flavored pumps. Aramark also added nutritious heat-and-serve breakfast options. At the middle school, Aramark launched made-to-order bars and, at the elementary schools, it launched its Cool*Caf concept. The company also added whole-grain smart snacks for purchase at all schools.

### Exemplary Participation & Feedback from Students

Not only has meal participation increased dramatically, the dining innovations have received exemplary feedback in Aramark’s annual Student ViewPOINT survey, small local surveys and students’ direct feedback. In particular, students love the made-from-scratch options, such as pizza, even opting to eat lunch at high school when they could drive home or go to local fast food restaurants.

### Morale Boost

The staff’s enthusiasm was revived on two levels—first, from serving students who were excited with their new dining choices and, second, from hands-on job training and motivational support.

### Improved Employee Retention

Staff morale has risen exponentially as students’ excitement about their dining program has increased. One of the results is improved employee retention in just one school year.

### School Promotions and Local Events

Along with dining innovation, Aramark also expanded the school district’s community involvement. The program now covers a wide range of activities, from school promotions to local events. School promotions include Aramark’s Fuel and Ace programs and awareness via the district’s social media platforms. Community events include district fun runs with healthy snacks and giveaways, sporting events, open houses, public presentations, board meetings, canned food drives and a Heart & Sole Wellness event. The dining team has also worked with the local Habitat for Humanity organization.

### Community Support

The schools have experienced a valuable increase in support from the community.

**Interested in learning what Aramark can do for your district?**

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