



STAFFING UP: STRATEGIES FOR WORKING THROUGH LABOR SHORTAGE CHALLENGES

With nationwide labor and supply shortages impacting every corner of the economy, more schools are looking to overcome hurdles with innovative ideas and approaches. Here are some strategies that school districts across the country have been using to staff up and persevere through this challenging time.

Recruit Volunteers

- **Encourage High School Students to Apply for Work-study or Volunteer Positions** - If the location and timing permits, students looking for work-study or volunteer service-learning hours can help with before-school prep, afterschool prep, or packing distance learning meals.
- **Connect with Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs** - Your local high schools may have students who are available and interested in gaining culinary experience by working before and after school to prepare meals.
- **Build Partnerships** - Local universities, wellness, culinary, and hospitality institutions may be able to help you find dietetic interns or undergraduate students in the nutrition department who can help outside of their academic schedule. Offering hands-on experiences can be a great resume builder for these students.

Tip: Collaboration Creates Mutual Wins

Foodbanks and Other Community Organizations may be able to help recruit, manage, and train volunteers. Reach out to summer meals program partners and organizations that aided the community through the COVID Pandemic to see how you can work together to overcome supply chain and staffing challenges.



Expand Staff Benefits

- **Increase Compensation or Use Signing Bonuses** - Many school districts have used emergency funding, such as ESSER Funding, to increase the hourly rate or provide one-time financial compensation as incentives for hiring. (Note: bonuses may not be available for union employees)
- **Pair Positions to Increase Benefits** - Pairing food services positions with other departments dealing with a labor shortage can help school district employees reach the required hours to receive benefits. For example, have a staffer work three hours in foodservice and four hours in transportation.

Tip: Find Creative Ways to Show Appreciation

While increased access to benefits and competitive compensation are the best ways to recruit and retain employees, celebrating everyday wins can be another way to show appreciation. Thank You cards, signs, student letters, etc., can be ways to show daily appreciation.

Broaden Your Advertising Plan

- **Promote Food Service Jobs Wherever You Can** - Promote the perks of working at the school, such as working only during school hours, no evening or weekend work, part-time options, benefits, etc. List advertisements on your schools' website, in school emails and communication to parents, and on lunch menus and in lunch menu widget pop-ups. Include advertisements on staff memos and mention job openings at staff meetings. If distributing to distance learners, send employment flyers home with grab 'n go meals.
- **Advertise at Unemployment Offices or Temporary Staffing Agencies** – Reach out to these agencies in your community to inquire about available staff.
- **Place Advertisements at Diners or Community Gathering Spaces** - Advertise on paper placemats at restaurants, in store windows, and on community bulletin boards. Include QR codes or SMS short codes for easy access to applications.
- **Pass Out Your Business Cards** – Design your business card with your contact information on the front, and job opening information on the back. Include a QR code for quick application reference.
- **Connect with Local Restaurants and Food-Related Businesses** - Restaurant staff may have the flexibility to work daytime hours, as their restaurant shifts may not start until the evening. Ask restaurant staff if they want to pick up extra hours to help prepare/serve meals at your school.
- **Hire Parents** - During the pandemic, some families experienced job loss and may not have considered working at school while their kids were in class. Using equitable and inclusive language, ask the PTA and schools to communicate job openings to parents.

Engage Non-School Nutrition Staff

- **Enlist Substitute Teachers** - Check with your districts' human resources department to see if substitute teachers could support the food service operations.
- **Everyone Can Lend a Hand** - Ask school administrative and support staff if they have the availability to help in the kitchen. Use a signup sheet or Google Doc to communicate when and what type of help is needed.



Utilize Creative Logistics

Another way to navigate staffing shortages is to be creative with staff hours and kitchen logistics to reduce and relieve labor needs. The examples below are methods that school districts have found to be helpful.

- **Implement Self-Service Options within High Schools** - This allows operations to continue with less staff.
- **Reassign Staff Throughout Your District Kitchens** - Having a flexible workforce allows for better preparation if a staffer or entire kitchen needs to quarantine. Be sure to reimburse employees for mileage if they are traveling to different kitchens to work.
- **Delegate Foodservice Needs** - Based on the size and number of kitchens throughout your district, you may be able to delegate services. For example, utilize a large kitchen to prep food for smaller kitchens (then deliver the necessary food items to each kitchen), use one kitchen to make all baked goods, etc.
- **Use Packaging Equipment to Increase Efficiency** - The investment in packaging equipment could decrease the labor hours needed to prepare and serve food, and allow you to make more self-serve food items.
- **Menu Changes** - Choose food and menu options based on the staff labor available. When fewer staff members are available, choose to make less labor-intensive food items.
- **Decrease Menu Options** - Serving fewer entrée choices may temporarily decrease the preparation needed to serve multiple meals.

School food service staffers are all doing fantastic work! Remember to celebrate accomplishments and express gratitude to your team in big and small ways, even as you work to find more to help. Appreciation can be in the form of a thank-you note or card, a catered lunch for kitchen staff, monetary bonuses or gift cards, or a recognition event at the school. A little recognition goes a long way!

