



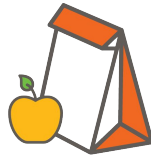
Feeding Burke County: A Behind the Scenes Look at Burke County School District's Non-Congregate Summer Food Service Program

By the Numbers



12

Kitchen Staff



21,000

Lunches



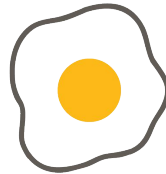
13

Bus Drivers



12

Box Packers &
Loaders



21,000

Breakfasts



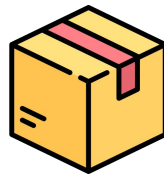
835

Square Miles



4

Support Staff



3,000

Boxes Per Week

3,000
Children Fed
EVERY. DAY.





During summer 2023, Burke County School District was the only Summer Food Service Program provider in Burke County, Georgia. Burke County covers 835 square miles and many families do not have access to reliable transportation. Classified as rural, Burke County School District was able to serve non-congregate meals across the county. They used a bus route delivery model to provide 3,000 meal boxes containing seven breakfasts and seven lunches to children and young people across the county each week.

This resource highlights Burke County School District's Summer Food Service Program. It provides behind the scenes and meal box distribution details that can help you implement a similar program in your community.

Behind the Scenes

The Set Up

Full-time staff work 40 hours per week Monday through Thursday. Staff are split between two school locations each with a production kitchen, a packing and staging area (located in the cafeteria), and a bus loading area.

Thirteen buses distribute meal boxes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On every distribution day, staff at each school are responsible for packing 750 boxes onto the buses— totalling 1,500 boxes per distribution day and 3,000 boxes per week. Every box contains seven breakfasts and seven lunches and includes a weekly menu, food storage instructions, food prep instructions, and a fun game for the kids. Each child receives one box and two half gallons of milk. In total, Burke County School District serves 42,000 meals per week.

Staffing

- 12 kitchen staff (six per school)
 - These staff members assemble and package menu items for the meal boxes; they are not responsible for cooking the food. The district uses pre-cooked items and scratch made items prepared and frozen during the school year.
- 12 box packers and loaders (six per school)
 - This group is typically a mix of high school students, recent graduates, and college students.
- 13 bus drivers (six at one school and seven at the other)
- 2 transportation department staff to oversee bus drivers (one per school)
- 2 administration staff to manage paperwork (one per school)

A Tip from Donna: Seek out school employees who might want a job over the summer. Young people (high school and college students), retired food service workers, and paraprofessionals are all great options.

The fewer staff required for summer meals results in high meals per labor hour. Combined with higher meal reimbursement through the Summer Food Service Program and lower operating costs (e.g., no running dishwashers, no mealtime clean up) make summer a profitable time for Burke County School District when compared to the school year. This allows them to reinvest in their school year programs and next summer's operations.

[Click here](#) for more photos of Burke County School District's Summer Food Service Program operations - both meal prep and delivery!



It Takes a Village

Burke County School District employs 41 staff to make their summer feeding program a reality, and this doesn't include important people like the school nutrition director and school staff involved in menu planning, outreach, and promotion. During No Kid Hungry's visit to Burke County, staff never complained about the early mornings (sometimes as early as 4:30am) or long days (staff work four, ten hour days during the week).

Staff did share about how important the summer feeding program was to the children and young people of Burke County. They shared about how much families love having fresh fruits and vegetables for their children over the summer. They shared that without the summer feeding program, they're not sure if children would have enough to eat over the summer.

This is their "why." So each week from June to August, 41 dedicated and talented individuals arrive in the early morning to feed Burke County. **Thank you, Burke County School Nutrition!**

The Meals

A week's worth of meals - seven breakfasts and seven lunches - go into each box. The district packs the meals using a low-prep, bulk-style strategy (e.g., a carton of strawberries, half gallons of milk, and loaves of bread with deli meats and cheese for sandwiches to be consumed across the week). Entree items are often purchased premade or are made from scratch and frozen earlier in the year like their BBQ pork filling.

The district utilizes fresh, local produce throughout the summer and makes sure each box has a “wow” factor— this could be fresh strawberries or blueberries or their famous scratch made BBQ pork sandwiches. The “wow” factor creates buzz and excitement about the program. When the first round of boxes are distributed, word spreads about what the special item is that week building excitement and an eagerness to go meet the bus.

Weekly Food Deliveries to the District

- **Monday** - the majority of food products are delivered
- **Tuesday** - bread is delivered and stored in the cooler
- **Tuesday and Thursday** - produce is delivered (on Tuesday for Thursday's distribution and on Thursday for Tuesday's distribution)
- **Monday through Thursday** - milk is delivered daily (four times throughout the week)

Food Storage

All schools have extra outdoor freezers in addition to indoor refrigerated walk-in space. The district also has warehouse space offsite for frozen items like beans, flours, grits, and BBQ pork. Non-perishables and packing supplies are stored in the cafeteria where boxes are staged.

A Tip from Donna: The gymnasium is another great place for storage and staging!

Monday & Wednesday - Getting Ahead

Kitchen staff and box packers and loaders arrive between 4-5am to begin food prep and assembling and packing boxes.

The cardboard boxes that the district sources cost \$1.49 per box. They come flat and unassembled. So, the first task on Monday is to tape up boxes and stage them on tables in the cafeteria. They use special tape that reads “KEEP

Donna Martin - A Summer Food Hero!

Donna Martin RDN, LD, SNS, EdS is the former Director of School Nutrition Programs at Burke County School District. Just a couple of weeks before her retirement, Donna welcomed the No Kid Hungry team to visit her program to observe and document their Summer Feeding Program. She has left a legacy in Burke County building up an incredibly impactful nutrition program that includes the Summer Food Service Program, CACFP At-risk Afterschool Meal Program, National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. Her program has gained national attention, garnering visits from former First Lady Michelle Obama and tv personality Al Roker. Donna is a true advocate for improving access to nutritious foods for children, and we are incredibly grateful to her for sharing her knowledge and expertise with us. You will find special tips from Donna throughout this resource.

Thank you, Donna!



REFRIGERATED” to remind families to unpack their boxes in a timely manner to prevent spoilage.

Non-perishable items and the weekly menus/instructions are packed into the assembled boxes. The half gallons of milk are packed into coolers, covered in ice, and stored in the refrigerated walk-in overnight so they're ready to be loaded onto buses the next morning.

Out for Delivery!

Working on the Bus

Each bus is staffed with a driver and one to two assistants to support box distribution at pick-up locations. The bus assistants work in the kitchen Monday and Wednesday and are out on the bus routes for distribution days on Tuesday and Thursday.

Buses are equipped with binders containing all of the necessary paperwork - equal opportunity statement, receipts, meal counting sheets, and lists of summer school students to avoid duplication of meal service.

Families can track the bus using [Samsara](#), a GPS bus tracking system used during the school year.

A Tip from Donna: Develop a relationship with your transportation department. Building that solid relationship allowed Burke County School District to negotiate usage of their propane buses (\$1/mile for propane versus \$3/mile for gas) and made developing bus routes and recruiting bus drivers so much easier.



Tuesday & Thursday - Distribution

Kitchen staff and box packers and loaders arrive between 4-5am for food prep and final box packing. Anything that can be frozen (e.g., juice, containers of BBQ pork, etc.) is packed frozen to keep everything cold and at a safe temperature making ice packs unnecessary. Fresh produce and other perishable items are added, and the boxes are taped closed with the special “KEEP REFRIGERATED” tape.

Staff then load the boxes and milk coolers onto the buses around 7:30am. They’ve found that loading boxes through the bus windows works the best!

Bus drivers arrive around 8am to prepare for their routes. Ahead of departure, bus assistants and bus drivers repack the individual half gallons of milk into pairs using [t-shirt bags](#) to make it easier for families to carry their milk and boxes. Each child receives one box and two half gallons of milk, so larger families often bring wagons or meet the bus with their car to make transporting the food back to their home a little easier.

Between 9-9:30am, bus drivers and bus assistants depart for their distribution routes across the county returning between 12-1pm. Tuesday and Thursday each have unique routes so that by the end of the week, every inch of Burke County’s 835 square miles is covered.

Distributing Meal Boxes to Families

Each bus has a set number of stops on its route. Stops include the end of driveways and rural roads, apartment complexes and mobile home parks, or central locations like gas stations. Routes are published for families to determine what is the best location for them to meet the bus. If they miss their usual distribution stop, families can find another convenient option later in the day or week. The caregiver or the child must be present to pick up their box (boxes are not left on doorsteps). At a stop, drivers park the bus, honk the horn, and the driver and bus assistants distribute boxes to excited children and families. They track the number of boxes distributed at each stop before heading to the next. Families with multiple children often meet the bus with wagons or their vehicles to more easily carry their meal boxes home.



Plan, Plan, Plan

Pre-Summer Planning

Planning begins in early spring in order to make June meal distribution a reality. [Planning early and collaboratively](#) across school and community stakeholders makes Burke County School District's summer meals program a success! Check out *No Kid Hungry's* [collaborative planning resources](#) and [Proactive Planning for Summer Meals Sponsors](#) for more on planning for summer meals.

Below is a general planning timeline and framework that you can follow for your own program:

- March
 - Order packing materials (e.g., tape, boxes, bags, etc.)
 - Plan the menus
 - Order food
 - Establish and foster relationships with your vendors

A Tip from Donna: The district avoids over ordering food by carefully examining how many boxes they will distribute for the summer.

- April/May
 - Hiring
 - Seek out board approval for positions
 - Put out an application
 - Conduct interviews
 - Get final approvals for hiring
 - Collect hiring/payroll paperwork
 - Train staff
 - Advertise the program
 - Work with transportation department to set bus routes
 - Print and distribute flyers to families

For more information and resources about Summer Meals, visit our website
bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/summer-meals

A Tip from Donna: Burke County School District offers "office hours" to help new staff (especially young people) complete their hiring and payroll paperwork.

