

RCSD Child Nutrition Team Wins Award, Delivers Over 500,000 Meals Since the Start of the Pandemic, and Provides Additional Meal Delivery Through the Holidays

East Palo Alto - This Thanksgiving, hundreds of Ravenswood City School District (RCSD) families across East Palo Alto will enjoy safe, nutritious, and free meals prepared by the RCSD Child Nutrition and Education (CNE) team. The CNE team has a lot to be thankful for as well, having recently won Second Harvest's prestigious "Big Apple" award and hitting a major milestone when they delivered their 500,000th meal during the pandemic.

"The district hasn't historically distributed meals during Thanksgiving Break," said Superintendent Gina Sudaria, "but this year we know that many of our families are counting on RCSD for quality meals during this difficult time. Delivering quality meals this week allows our families to access a full week of pre-packaged, fresh, and healthy breakfasts, lunches, and dinners. This will help our students and families recharge over the holiday break. We expect to serve approximately over 12,000 meals during Thanksgiving Break alone."

After preparing and distributing meals on Tuesday, November 24th, the CNE team will also take the remaining week to recharge. While the team has long prepared meals for in-school distribution, at the start of the shutdown the CNE team had to quickly invent an entirely new approach. "When the district announced they were going remote on Friday March 13, we were ready with a new meal distribution on Monday, March 16th," said June Richardson. "Our students and families count on us to provide a number of meals -- breakfast, lunch, supper and afternoon snacks -- so we created safe ways for families to pick up complimentary meals in person."

The approach has evolved over time. While initially providing more traditional school meals, the CNE team realized that families preferred more meal boxes. "We work closely with our families and have changed to include more of what they tell us they want, such as adding more fresh fruits, vegetables along with distributing whole pizzas for families, not just our traditional single slices" said Byron Montenegro, a kitchen manager at Belle Haven. "Of course, we still provide already assembled meals for those families who don't have a kitchen at home," added Fidel Alas the kitchen manager at Costano.

RCSD also realized that some families could not leave their homes to pick up meals -- especially those who were caregivers for a family member or child with significant, moderate to severe disabilities, so the district created a system to deliver meals to families in these situations. "This has become a big part of what we do," explained Delma Camacho, Director of Operations. We started with home delivery being 30% of our meal distribution and we are currently up to 50% of meals being home delivered."

This creativity was recently recognized by Second Harvest and the San Mateo County Office of Education when the district was awarded its first "Big Apple Award." The award is given to

school groups showing extraordinary effort. In winning the award, RCSD was cited for its tireless dedication to its students, as well as the innovation the district has shown in responding to the needs of the pandemic.

At the end of October, the district distributed its five hundred thousandth meal during the course of the pandemic. So far this year, the district has -- surprisingly -- prepared and distributed over 10% more meals than in prior years. As Juan Vizcardo, the CNE team's warehouse manager explained, "we've made it easy for our parents to swing by and pick up meals while they're out doing errands - this convenience, and quality, has helped explain how we've been able to distribute so many meals."

In October, the district began to welcome some students back onto campus as part of the district's "[learning hubs](#)." Pat Norton, the kitchen manager at Cesar Chavez Ravenswood Middle School, observed that "it's been wonderful having some students back on campus and to be able to provide them with hot lunches. We're ready to support our students no matter what, whether they are in distance learning or here in person."

Until all students are back, the CNE team will continue distributing meals every Monday and Wednesday from 8am to 2pm at each of our school sites, just as they have for the last eight months. Click [here to learn more](#).