

School nutrition professionals brace for continued supply chain challenges

A new report by the School Nutrition Association reveals that supply chain issues remain a struggle heading into the new school year.

By [Benita Gingerella](#) on Jul. 27, 2022



School nutrition professionals are gearing up for more supply chain challenges this upcoming school year, [a new report by the School Nutrition Association reveals](#).

The report compiled findings from a series of listening sessions held this spring with school nutrition professionals, food distributors and state agency staff.

During the sessions, participants revealed their current supply chain struggles and anticipated another hard year for school foodservice.

Problems ahead

While school nutrition directors look forward to introducing new menu items and bringing back options such as salad bars this year, many say they are still struggling to get the products they need.

“Most directors report spending hours on the phone each week with manufacturers and distributors to determine product availability and alternatives, continually scrambling to change planned menus—and apologizing to students and parents,” the report said.

Listening session participants said beef products, paper goods, canned fruit, whole-grain items, condiments and more have been hard to obtain.

To help with procurement challenges, directors are doing everything from stocking up on shelf-stable items to cutting pizza boxes and clamshell containers in half to create makeshift trays.

Food distributors echoed school nutrition teams’ supply chain concerns. Those that participated in the sessions said that they had difficulty with rising material and fuel costs, sourcing raw materials and delays at ports. Staffing production lines and finding enough drivers have also been challenges. The report shared that distributors and brokers want to keep serving the K-12 segment, however, districts need to be flexible and find ways to work collaboratively.

Managing challenges

During the listening sessions, participants were asked to share resources that would help them better manage current and future challenges. They discussed the need for communications tools and templates, such as a national media campaign designed to help parents and school stakeholders understand the current challenges in school foodservice.

They also noted the importance of reaching out to lawmakers to advocate on behalf of the industry and working to build partnerships with those in the food, foodservice, hunger relief and education communities.

“It is essential that all stakeholders in the school nutrition segment—including school administrators, families, advocacy organizations and state and local legislators— work together to develop strategies that will sustain school meal programs through this extended period of crisis,” the report said.

“Communities rely on these programs to deliver nutritious meals to all students, while providing a critical nutrition and hunger safety net for those children most in need.”