



# Nourishing Bodies and Minds While Students Learn at Home

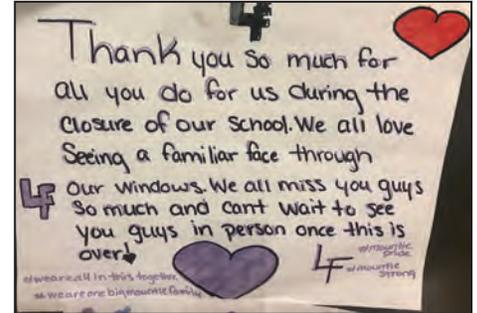
When most people think of frontline workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the first thoughts that come to mind are doctors, nurses, and other hospital personnel. The Little Falls Central School district has its own set of heroes—individuals who sprang into action when the Governor closed schools on March 18th to ensure no child went without food while sheltering-in-place at home.

The meal program was initiated by Governor Cuomo's executive order that required schools to continue foodservice programs—fully-aided by the state for all who participate.

With this directive in mind, administrative staff and the foodservice and transportation departments set forth a mission to create a program to prepare breakfast and lunch—available to every student in the district. The process started slowly as some parents did not have transportation while others felt uncomfortable picking up meals. Staff rapidly responded and enacted a plan to ultimately deliver door-to-door, utilizing district and Little Falls-Fonda contracted buses, for those families who requested food for their children.

"I was impressed by how quickly both the foodservice and transportation departments were able to adapt to a new and unprecedented situation. We had no blueprint for this, and the supervisors and their respective staff worked tirelessly to begin meal delivery in a matter of days from school being closed. Having been deemed essential by state guidelines, they have continued to work without pause since March 18th to provide our students with the meals so many count on during regular school. Their efforts are truly appreciated," commented Director of Business Operations/Technology Ashraf Allam.

"Initially it was challenging to figure out the logistics, but we worked through it and today we are providing 500+ students with breakfast and lunch for the week, delivering Mondays and Thursdays," said School Nutrition Program Director Stephanie Johnson. "Our staff members are truly frontline workers. In the beginning, they were a bit hesitant to come to work and leave their families, but they quickly pulled through as they understood what we needed to do and the importance of feeding kids that might otherwise go hungry. They are doing an amazing job," Johnson said.



*Benton Hall staff working on the food program include, I to r, Cindy Grainer, Silvana Burk, Stephanie Johnson, School Nutrition program director, Stacey Palmer, Margo Quatrino, and Jessica Chandler.*



*High School staff working on the food program include, I to r, Mike Sabatino, motor vehicle operator, Janice Goriashak, Jessica Bucenec, Deborah Fitch, Patricia Young, Veronica Sullivan, and Rachael Randall.*

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When asked how food service was protecting both staff and the students receiving the meals, Johnson explained that food service workers are always required to wear protective gear such as gloves, they just needed to add masks and self-distance.

The menus are similar to what's offered throughout the year, and meals are delivered on Mondays and Thursdays to cover the week. Kids are enjoying homemade treats such as banana bread and yogurt parfaits. Breakfast can include cereal and fruit. Lunch can include pizza, hot dogs, or chicken tenders—choices that are both popular and follow dietary guidelines.

"I've received a lot of phone calls and hand-written notes from parents thanking us for this program. I haven't gotten any complaints and everyone seems happy," Johnson added.

This food service program could not operate without the assistance of the district's transportation department. Every staff member is equipped with protective gear such as masks and gloves, and food is left at front doors and in boxes to adhere to self-distancing requirements.

Senior Bus Driver Deborah Taylor explained that the program is staffed with five Little Falls district bus drivers, five district volunteers, and the rest of the routes are covered by Little Falls-Fonda Bus Corporation with contracted services.

"Those five drivers from the Little Falls district are accompanied by five Little Falls school employees who volunteer their time. It's not an easy job delivering from the bus—climbing stairs and walking driveways at over 350 stops. Drivers and volunteers show up to work happy knowing what they are doing is helping the kids," Taylor said.

The drivers have also become a connection from school to the community. "One driver, 'Grandma' (as the kids call her) Dawn Beers, has driven for the district for over 30 years. She knows all the students on her route. She has certainly seen some waves of appreciation from kids in windows. We've also gotten thank you notes with some parents also coming out of their homes to thank staff personally," Taylor added.

The program is slated to end Wednesday, June 17th, but food will be delivered to cover the rest of that week. At this time, it is uncertain whether the program might continue after that date. What is certain is that those involved in this program are helping the school community. Little Falls staff members are especially touched by a senior student who leaves a special note each Monday and Thursday within a delivery box to express her appreciation. Sometimes it those little touches that remind individuals that the job they are doing is making a big difference for parents and children.

*Please remember to return your completed ballot for the budget and board election by June 9th at 5:00 PM. If you have any questions, please contact [sbeaulieu@lfcasd.org](mailto:sbeaulieu@lfcasd.org).*



*Drivers and volunteers working to deliver lunches made at the Benton Hall kitchen include, l to r, Barry Smith, Joann Pettengill, Jim Smith, Jen Smith, Charla Wadin, Brad Nichols, Amber Quakenbush, and Jean Smith.*



*Drivers and volunteers working to deliver lunches made at the High School include, front row, l to r, Luke Frasier, Jennifer Comstock, Adrian Morse, Steven Nash, Kristy Kinville, Lisa Urich, Dawn Beers, and Brian Patrei. Back row, l to r, Jonathon Sullivan, Mark Dillenbeck, Eyn Fessenden, John Kee, Gary Crouse, Deborah Taylor, senior bus driver, Bobbi Jo Schwasnik, Lynne Fahey, and Amy Gabriel.*