



CASE STUDY:

**BEST PRACTICES FOR MANAGING K-12  
CENTRAL KITCHENS: LESSONS LEARNED  
FROM ROUND ROCK ISD**

Central kitchens that prepare food for multiple schools within a district can significantly improve operational efficiency, cost-effectiveness and food safety. However, managing a central kitchen comes with its own set of challenges. With so many schools depending on them, central kitchen managers need to be even more strategic about planning menus, ordering and ensuring timely delivery.

Located about 20 miles north of Austin, TX, Round Rock Independent School District (ISD) has two central kitchens that prepare 37,500 meals a day for 53 schools across a 110-square-mile area. As the district's food service partner for more than 40 years, Aramark manages operations for both central kitchens.

Here's a closer look at the success of the partnership and best practices other central kitchens can follow.



# ARAMARK AND ROUND ROCK PARTNERSHIP AT A GLANCE



1978

**1978**

Partnership began with Aramark proudly serving the 11 Round Rock ISD schools.

**LATE 1970S TO THE MID 80S**

Round Rock's population had doubled from 8,066 students to more than 16,000, and Aramark had opened the first central kitchen—a bakeshop that prepares large quantities of baked goods to be delivered to each of the schools.



**2001**

The district's population had doubled again to more than 32,600 students. As the district's kitchens prepared larger quantities of food to accommodate this massive growth, the Aramark team identified opportunities to further streamline food preparation.

Aramark and Round Rock ISD opened a second central kitchen as a cook- chill facility. This allowed foodservice staff to purchase ingredients in higher volumes and prepare entrées more efficiently. Typical entrees prepared at the central kitchen include tacos, enchiladas, pasta, chili, and macaroni and cheese.



**CURRENT DAY**

Round Rock's population has grown to more than 50,000 students, Aramark's scalable approach to managing its central kitchens and seamless coordination with the staff at each individual kitchen has allowed the district to keep up with the increased demand.



2020

## Key elements of Aramark's central kitchen management process include:

- **Using a centralized software system for ordering and menu planning** to consolidate individual orders and optimize budgeting
- **Planning meals around government-funded commodity ingredients**, such as ground beef and flour, to save money and help manage the dining budget
- **Creating pre-made kits for individual schools from bulk-purchased ingredients**, such as spice packets and rice for seasoned rice dishes, which ensures consistent food quality and minimal waste
- **Using industrial baking equipment** that is regularly serviced and maintained
- **Hosting standardized training for all foodservice staff** to ensure food safety and efficiency
- **Reinforcing safety** with staff manuals and posters
- **Mapping out food delivery routes** based on a school's distance from the central kitchens, what type of food is being delivered, outside temperatures and traffic patterns
- **Breaking down food orders into smaller quantities** and delivering them at the right times to avoid waste, since most schools don't have large on-site storage
- **Maintaining checks and balances on ordering, packaging and delivery** with multiple checkpoints from several team members to eliminate errors
- **Adjusting menu plans as needed to use remaining inventory in a timely manner**, which reduces waste

# 4 BIG WINS ROUND ROCK ACHIEVED WITH ARAMARK'S LEADERSHIP

## 1. GREATER EFFICIENCY

Thanks to its two central kitchens, purchasing and preparing large batches in one location makes it easier to control food quantity, quality, safety and costs at Round Rock ISD. For example, during the 2019 Thanksgiving season, **the central kitchens cooked and sliced over 500 cases of turkey (10,000 pounds)** thanks to three commercial-size ovens and a meat slicer. The baking kitchen can bake **720 cinnamon rolls at one time**. The Aramark team works closely with the district to ensure the central kitchens have the right equipment for optimal efficiency. The team makes recommendations for equipment maintenance and upgrades to meet the needs of the growing district and to improve culinary capabilities.

### What Powers Round Rock ISD's Central Kitchens?

*The central kitchens use industrial baking equipment, including:*

- 3 roll-in-rack ovens (1,200 lb. capacity each)
- Tilt skillets (40 lb. capacity each)
- Steam jacketed kettles (60 qt. capacity each)
- Cook-chill tank (600 lb. capacity)
- Burger patty machine (2,100 patties per hour)
- Blast chiller
- Buffalo chopper
- 200 qt. spiral floor mixer
- Multiple 80 qt. floor mixers
- Dough and batter depositor
- Dough sheeter
- Roll-in rack proofer
- Sheet pan wrapping machine



## 2. MORE COST-EFFECTIVE OPERATIONS

Aramark's central kitchen staff leadership has expertise in menu planning and ordering, ensuring the district maximizes the government commodity procurement programs and reimbursements available to them. To maximize value, they plan around a combination of "pass-through" commodity items from food manufacturers as well as USDA direct delivery "Brown Box" and Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program items. The central kitchens have the equipment and experienced staff to process these ingredients and prepare them so they are more cost-effective and easier for individual kitchens to use.



### 3. REDUCTIONS IN FOOD WASTE

Our Aramark team has also reduced food waste in the central kitchens through inventory management. For example, bulk foods are broken down into smaller units, so schools only receive what they need. **Round Rock ISD has made significant strides in food waste reduction, including a weekly reduction of 4.9% per student (5,439 pounds district-wide) just within the past year.**

### 4. IMPROVEMENTS IN FOOD QUALITY AND SAFETY

By consolidating meal prep in its central kitchens, the Aramark team at Round Rock maintains better control over cleanliness and accident prevention. Instead of having a meat slicer in every school, all meat is sliced in the central kitchen. Centralizing this task and hosting targeted training has reduced the risk of cuts. **The central kitchens have achieved consistent year-over-year improvements in accident prevention, reducing accidents by 53% in SY2018-19.**

Cleanliness goals are met through a master cleaning schedule, documented food handling processes, communicating expectations to employees and holding them accountable. Expectations include double- and triple-checking all steps in the food prep and cleaning processes. A safety manual tracks all vital information for easy access, such as appropriate temperatures for heating and cooling large-batch menu items.



# ROUND ROCK ISD CENTRAL KITCHENS: QUICK STATS

- 37,500 total meals served per day (30,000 reimbursable and 7,500 equivalent)
- 25 food service employees, including delivery drivers
- Reduced district-wide food waste by 5,349 pounds from SY 2017-18 to SY 2018-19, a per-capita reduction of nearly 5%
- Reduced the number of accidents by 86% from SY 2015-16 to 2018-19

**“Our Central Kitchen Management Team does an amazing job making sure accurate orders are being placed with food and beverage vendors, food safety is being practiced during food production and daily menu items are being transported to all the schools in a timely manner.”**

— Shaun Taylor, Round Rock ISD Central Kitchen Director

Aramark’s management of Round Rock’s central kitchens has been a vital link in providing a high volume of quality meals across a large, densely populated district. The central kitchen staff constantly evaluate operations to optimize menu planning, ordering, food preparation and delivery. In the near future, they plan to update some older equipment and add new equipment to help expand food production variety. Partnering with Aramark to manage central kitchen and school foodservice operations has allowed the district to produce safe, high-quality food while maximizing efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

*Learn more about how Aramark can help your district maximize the value of its central kitchens.*

**GET STARTED**

