

# Case Study: Maranatha Christian Academy

Serving grades preK-12



## Experienced Food Service Director Keeps Private Program Humming

Every day, Traci Thorsen, Food Service Director at Maranatha Christian Academy, and her two teammates prepare seven different daily lunch options plus offer breakfast and a la carte service for the private school of 830 students. They do a lot for a small team! And they work in a small kitchen with limited cooking equipment.

The team at Maranatha is so incredibly efficient in large part due to Traci's 18 years of experience at the school. In addition to budgeting, she single-handedly provides made-to-order and a la carte breakfast service; plans the hot lunch, cold lunch, soup and salad menus; places distributor orders; compiles reports; and runs the point-of-sale system.



### Experienced FSD Backed by Commissary & Corporate Team

Traci has guided Maranatha's food service program through a lot of changes, many of which came in SY2008/09, when the school consolidated its two campuses into one, implemented a point-of-sale system and enrolled in the National School Lunch Program. With all the changes, the school's administration contracted with CKC Good Food to ensure Traci had the support she needed. What has transpired is a long-term partnership that has flexed with the school's food service needs through the years.

When signing on, CKC Good Food didn't force changes upon Traci. Instead, the company's Founder and CEO Nancy Close observed Traci's work and consulted on challenges that arose, menu ideas, budgeting and staffing. One of the company's Client Services Managers checked in with Traci regularly.

In SY2020/21, the school and CKC Good Food agreed to fully transition the food service department and its employees to CKC Good Food. As a company team member, Traci now attends annual summer training and monthly meetings for managers of client kitchens operated by CKC Good Food. She gains perspective from other schools' programs, gets regular food safety training and participates in discussions on CKC Good Food's policies and procedures. Her perspective helps other kitchen managers improve.

(more)



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While Traci does all her own menu planning, she considers new recipes created by CKC Good Food's recipe development team in addition to her own recipes when building out a new menu. She also gets the allergen-free meals for her students with food allergies from CKC Good Food's central commissary to streamline her daily production and minimize potential adverse effects.

Traci appreciates that CKC Good Food's HR Coordinator does the initial legwork for hiring her team members. After candidates are screened for the needed skills, Traci interviews them to choose the best fit for the range of responsibilities: cooking, serving, inventory management, ingredient cost tracking, production reports, etc.

## Menus Built Around the Students

Planning menus for private programs like Maranatha is not nearly as laborious as it is for schools participating in the National School Lunch Program. Maranatha operated under the federal program for a few years until complaints from students and parents, and plummeting participation caused the school to leave the program.

"Our kids hated it and they let us know. The parents let us know," she said. "Our numbers went way down because the kids didn't like the food. With only 9% of our students qualifying, it didn't make sense for our school."

Traci is free to create menus based on the students' preferences, her budget and the capacity of her small kitchen, which has only a convection oven for cooking. At the end of each year, she goes through her menu to determine what to keep and what to replace.

"Our kids are spoiled," she said. "I've come to know what they like and expect."

Since she knows the students so well, she rarely misses when adding a new item to the menu. She knows after serving a new item two or three times whether it's a keeper.

The students and staff both like the Asian meals: orange chicken, sesame chicken and General Tso's chicken, and brunch lunches, like Belgian waffles and French toast sticks. On Thursdays, when Godfather's Pizza is served, 100 pizzas are devoured in two hours!

Maranatha's daily lunch participation holds steady, even if a less popular hot meal is served because there are several options from which students can choose. A la carte sales are also predictable and brisk. Because the school lacks storage space, Traci places orders for a la carte items – fresh fruit, yogurt parfait, candy, 10 different kinds of drinks – frequently.

Breakfast is also tailored to the students' preferences. The school tried offering full breakfast many years ago and learned that made-to-order microwaved items and a la carte service was a better fit and resulted in less wasted food. Traci single-handedly executes breakfast service every morning.

## Service Tailored to the School's Need

CKC Good Food's relationship with Maranatha Christian Academy has grown from a supporting role to operating the program completely. Throughout the run, Traci Thorsen has been at the center, calling on CKC Good Food teammates and resources to navigate changes and continue running the school's program as efficiently as possible. She has found that support to be reliable, timely and helpful.



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