

## Meet The Member

**CASSI O'MEARA**  
MANAGEMENT ASSISTANT  
FOOD AND NUTRITION  
RICHFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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### **Tell us about your district:**

*Our Food Service Department at Richfield Public Schools serves six schools and three satellite schools, roughly 5100 meals a day.*

### **Tell us about your involvement in MSNA and how membership supports your career path:**

*I have been a member of MSNA for five years and have appreciated the wealth of knowledge I have learned since attending my first conference in 2021 (and every year after). Since gaining more knowledge from the conferences and webinars, I have been able to make career moves, using that knowledge to help support our department at every level, from kitchen assistants to kitchen managers, and now to support my director and our entire department.*

### **What motivates you to work in school nutrition?**

*I am such an advocate for the kids. When I worked in the sorority house (which ultimately led me to K-12 schools), all that these students wanted was good food, and I made it a passion of*

*mine to provide that for them. When I left the sorority house and came to K-12 kitchens, I saw room for growth in how we can make these kids love the food they eat daily in the schools. From how we prepare it, to how we hold it, to how we serve it. That is how I became so motivated to stay in this career. For me, it's the kids, what we can do with the food we serve them, the love that goes into the food we serve them, and the happiness it gives me to see that these kids have someone supporting them who cares about what they eat.*

**What don't people know about school nutrition that they should?**

*School nutrition departments are only given so much per meal to source the products needed, labor, supplies, benefits, and other indirect costs. We do our best with what we are given to make the meals the best they can be.*

**Describe how you have been mentored in your school nutrition career and if you've had the opportunity to mentor someone else.**

*I have had many great examples of leaders (shout out to Ashley Schneider and Michael Manning) along my path that led me to want to go further and further into this industry. I still have many goals in my career that I hope to achieve someday, one of those being a mentor to someone who is as passionate about the kids and their wants and needs as I have been throughout my journey in school nutrition.*

**How has working in schools been different?**

*The key difference between working at the collegiate level and at the K-12 level is that K-12 students have less of a say and fewer options in what they can grab daily for breakfast and lunch because of the requirements we must follow. My sorority girls had all the input they wanted and could have really whatever they wanted daily. K-12 kiddos do not get that luxury, but we can do the best with what we have and let them feel heard by watching certain patterns and making necessary changes.*

**Describe the most popular meal on your lunch menu and your personal favorite.**

*The most popular lunches throughout the district are pizza, then orange chicken, and walking tacos. My personal favorite is street tacos at the high school. Our amazing production cook makes a mild green salsa from scratch, and we use local corn tortillas from La Perla Taqueria here in Minneapolis. Yummy!*

**Share with us how you can sense students are having a bad day and how you cheer them up.**

*Their attitude says everything. In my personal experience, letting them feel their feelings and be how they want to be (quiet, not talkative, sassy, etc.), has shown them that I understand they may be having a bad day. Just by continuing to be kind and giving them a nice "Thanks bud" or "Thank you, have a good day," often I will get a quiet "Thank you" or nothing at all and that is okay too. Just to know that I gave no judgment or attitude back to them is all that was needed to not make their day any harder than it already has been.*

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**Do you have a favorite special event that your nutrition team hosts for the school community each year?**

*Our high school staff makes lunch for the All-District Welcome Back staff meeting each year, and that is so fun to be a part of and help where I can for that. It gets crazy feeding all the staff throughout the district for lunch in a matter of one hour, but our staff always gets great compliments for their work and it's always nice to see the whole staff back after a nice summer break. It's a great way to kick off the school year!*

**What is the most challenging aspect of your job and the most rewarding?**

*The most challenging is the day-to-day unexpected situations that can occur throughout our districts' kitchens from staffing to equipment breakdowns or IT problems. We get through it because our incredible staff always finds a way to grind through those moments and make it work.*

*The most rewarding part of my job is for sure the kids, and helping the families navigate school food. Richfield has been a great community to work for which makes my job that much better!*

*- Cassi O'Meara, Management Assistant Food and Nutrition, Richfield Public Schools*

***“Cassi O'Meara has grown into a wonderful manager supporting all children with their meal services while in school and has grown to help other school nutrition professionals be successful in their journey.”***

*- Ashley Schneider, MSNA Vice President*