

Meet the Member

TRACY SMITH

FOOD SERVICE COORDINATOR

**BURNSVILLE-EAGAN-SAVAGE
ISD 191**

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Tell us about your role:

I have been with Burnsville-Eagan-Savage ISD 191 since August 2002; started as a short hour and toggled between positions and sites while working my way up the ladder. I have been in my current position as Food Service Coordinator since October 2015. Before stepping into school nutrition at Burnsville, I worked in the food service industry including production bakeries.

How did you first get involved with MSNA, and in what ways has being a member contributed to your career growth?

It all started with my first MSNA Annual Conference in Duluth in the early 2000's. It was there that I realized what an impact an organization like this had. If you've never attended, give it a chance. The insight from speakers and educational sessions along with networking are just part of what's contributed to my career growth.

What do you enjoy most about your current position, and what motivates you to work in school nutrition?

There are countless things I enjoy; at the district level, procurement tops that list. At site level, I enjoy production time and receiving prime vendor orders with food service staff, nothing like that rotation workout to bond over. I also love when I get the opportunity to be a part of breakfast or lunch service with the students of every grade level, it's on

those serving lines that hits home why we're there. It also offers great insight as to what's working and what's not. Plus, you get to hear unfiltered opinions from the students, which is awesome.

Being the liaison between District Level and Site Level Food Service Staff also gives me purpose. The students are what motivates me, they're what fuels my purpose, everything I do is ultimately for them.

What do you think people often overlook about school nutrition that they should understand better? What challenges do you face?

A stock answer is how much truly goes into providing appealing, safe, and healthy meals that students will consume. John Oliver did a great episode on just that; Season 11 Episode 22, September 2024. One thing often overlooked is the importance of empowering the students to make their own choices. A friendly face and encouragement work wonders.

A challenge that comes to mind is when at a site, I ask many questions to understand the 'whys' of that kitchen's process(es) with the ultimate goal of realistic consistencies and efficiencies throughout the district. It's amazing how one little change can make a world of difference; nuggets of knowledge are everywhere. Frequently those questions are received as judgement. When that happens, open conversations are initiated, sometimes those conversations need to get pushed to another day. Those conversations are not always easy but they're needed to be able to move forward and refocus on why we are there, the students.

How have you been mentored throughout your school nutrition career, and have you had the opportunity to mentor others along the way?

Mentorship to me means working together vs under one's wings; learning and then partnering. I personally have learned an abundance from so many. Hopefully, others I've worked with feel the same way about me. I like to tell staff that they will always have me in their back pockets. I pride myself in being a good resource; if I'm unsure, I'll find out.

What's the most popular meal on your lunch menu? Do you have a personal favorite, and why?

French toast sticks have been on the leaderboard for many years as have popcorn chicken bowls and rice bowls. Honestly, I'm not sure I have a stand out favorite; I simply love School Lunch!!! (Breakfast too!)