

**RCSD to make own sandwiches after ‘discolored’ batch from food supplier is served to students**

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Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Students in the Rochester City School District have been given a particularly unappetizing sandwich for lunch the last two days, but district representatives and the food contractor say it’s not mold but rather “uneven curing.”

Nonetheless, the district is switching to making its own cold sandwiches starting Thursday, the next day of inperson learning. Teachers in school buildings have widely shared photos from Monday and Tuesday showing what appears to be bologna sandwiches with gray spots. Many of the same teachers have been vocal opponents of RCSD’s reopening plan and point to it as evidence of poor planning and lack of funding.

The sandwiches are provided by Tasty Brands, a Long Island contractor. In a letter to the district Tuesday, Quality Assurance Manager Kelly Illardo apologized for the problem but said it “in no way represents a food safety issue,” but rather was due to “uneven curing during the production process.”

“Since we use a minimal amount of a curing agent, higher density meat may appear lighter in color resulting in distinct visual differences,” Illardo wrote. “However, we understand that the turkey bologna and turkey salami was less than visually appealing, and we are committed to completing a thorough investigation to confirm the root cause.”

In its own statement, the district said the sandwiches did not meet its standards and were pulled from distribution as soon as the problem was recognized.

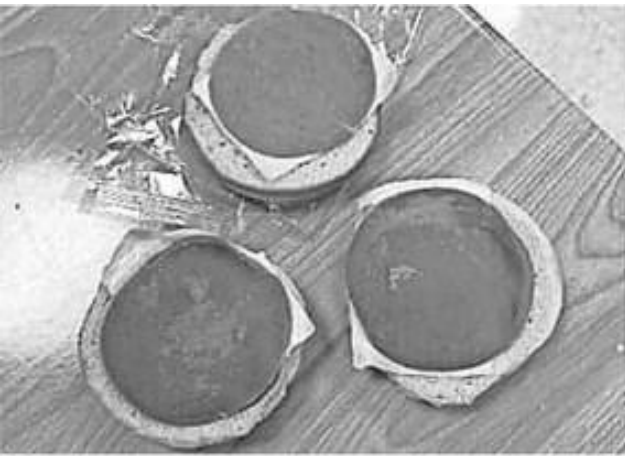
“Beginning Thursday, March 4, the RCSD will make all of its sandwiches in house for students learning in-person,” spokeswoman Marisol Ramos-Lopez said in a statement. “The product for the sandwiches will come from local vendors. Meals for the foreseeable future will include deli sandwiches, a fruit of the day, a vegetable, juice, a snack item, and milk.”

Speaking to the school board last week, Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small confirmed the district cannot afford to hire back the certified staff necessary to provide hot meals for the rest of the year.

School board member Amy Maloy, a teacher in Brighton and mother of students at World of Inquiry School 58 and East High School, called the sandwiches “disgusting” and said the district must find the money to hire back the appropriate staff.

“What I’m seeing in RCSD should not be served to our students, especially when there are local organizations offering to help us,” she wrote on Facebook. “The food waste is unbelievable. And I’m not going to stop demanding better meals. The message we are sending kids in RCSD is they aren’t worth better.”

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**A photo of bologna sandwiches served Tuesday to Rochester City School District students. PROVIDED**

The incident is not directly related to reopening; RCSD has an ongoing contract for meals from Tasty Brands. But the district had already come under fire for providing only cold meals.

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