Mei Sato - Wharton MBA application

Pittsburgh, PA · mei.sato.test@example.com · Applying to: Wharton MBA (University of Pennsylvania), 2026-27

This is a fictional applicant written for this sample. Her employer, volunteer organisation and recommenders are invented.

Program and round

- Full-time MBA, Class of 2029. Round 2 (January 2027 deadline).
- Intended major: Operations, Information and Decisions (OIDD).

Education and test

- **University of Pittsburgh** - BS Industrial Engineering, April 2022. GPA 3.34. Worked 15 hours a week in Pitt Dining Services throughout.
- Spring 2020 semester GPA 2.71 (see Optional essay).
- **GMAT Focus Edition** (September 2026): 655 (Quantitative 83, Verbal 82, Data Insights 80). Second sitting; first was 605.

Resume

KEYSTONE SCHOOL MEALS - Pittsburgh, PA (Jul 2022 - present) *Contract school-meal producer: central kitchens in Pittsburgh, Erie and Altoona; 610 employees; about 118,000 meals a day for 84 school districts.*

Production Planning Manager (Feb 2025 - present)

- Lead 3 planners who turn district menus into daily production schedules for all three kitchens.
- Rebuilt the menu-to-purchasing plan with batch sizes matched to real attendance; food cost per meal fell from $1.62 to $1.49 in the 2025-26 school year, about $2.6M saved.
- Led the rollout of digital line scheduling at the Erie kitchen (Sep 2025). The first launch failed: 9 late truck departures in two weeks. Paused it, rebuilt the training with Erie's line leads, relaunched in November; late departures now 0.4% of trucks.
- Ran the 6-person cross-kitchen team that planned meals for 3 new districts added in August 2026.

Operations Analyst (Jul 2022 - Jan 2025)

- Designed a two-person allergen check at packing. With no authority over the line, won over 11 line leads by piloting on one shift; labelling errors fell from 14 (2023) to 2 (2024).
- Taught myself Python in evenings to automate the weekly yield report; cut it from 6 hours of Excel to 20 minutes.

- Promoted to manager after 2.5 years, the first analyst promoted directly into planning.

ADDITIONAL

- Saturday shift lead, Hazelwood Community Pantry, Pittsburgh (2022 - present, about 4 hours a week).
- Bicycle restoration: taught myself from manuals and videos; rebuilt 17 donated bikes given away through the pantry.
- Languages: English (native), Japanese (conversational; my mother's first language).
- Interests: Pittsburgh Pirates, long rides on the Great Allegheny Passage, cooking for too many people.

Short answer: Post-MBA goals (50 words)

Short term, a strategy or operations role at a large institutional food-service company working on K-12 contracts. Long term, Chief Operating Officer of a school-meal provider that serves fresher food at the same reimbursement rate.

Essay 1: How do you plan to use the Wharton MBA program to help you achieve your future professional goals? (500 words)

Every school morning at 4:30 a.m., the first trucks leave our Pittsburgh kitchen. The federal reimbursement for a free lunch is fixed, so every cent I take out of waste becomes a cent a district can spend on food a child might actually eat. That arithmetic is why I have stayed in school meals for four years.

I fell into the work. At Pitt I worked in dining services to pay rent, and I took the Keystone analyst job because it was close to home and used my engineering degree. I stayed because I saw how much of a lunch tray is decided by planning. When I rebuilt our batch sizes around real attendance, food cost fell 13 cents a meal. Across 118,000 meals a day, that is real money.

I have also learned where my skills stop. In 2026 our company lost a bid for a 9,000-student district. Our food cost was lower, but a national competitor offered financing for kitchen equipment and a nutrition-education program. I could explain our per-meal costs to the cent; I could not have built their offer. Contract pricing, capital decisions and what districts value beyond price are now the questions that matter. That is why I want an MBA now and not in five years.

Short term, I want a strategy or operations role at a large institutional food-service company with K-12 contracts, so I learn how a national player prices, bids and invests. Long term, I want to be COO of a regional school-meal provider and prove that fresher, locally sourced meals can work at federal reimbursement rates.

Wharton fits that plan in three ways. First, the OIDD major would give me the supply-chain and decision tools I have been building by trial and error; I want to take courses on operations strategy and pricing. Second, Business Economics and Public Policy courses would help me understand the policy

side, from reimbursement formulas to procurement rules, that my bosses handle and I only see. Third, I want finance strong enough to evaluate kitchen equipment and long contracts, which I lack today.

Outside class, I want the Wharton Social Impact Initiative, where I could work on food-access projects, and a Leadership Venture, because the lesson I learned at Erie is that a good plan fails if the people running it do not trust it. Philadelphia is also a large school-meal market; I want to visit its central kitchens and learn how a big urban district thinks.

I do not want to leave operations. I want to run the whole business, not one part of it.

Essay 2: How will you make specific, meaningful contributions to the Wharton community? (400 words)

My first relaunch at Erie taught me more than my successes. In September 2025 I rolled out digital line scheduling that I had designed carefully and explained badly. I trained the line leads with slides about efficiency. Within two weeks nine trucks left late, and the Erie plant manager told me, "You presented to my people like they were a spreadsheet." It stung because it was true.

I paused the rollout and spent three weeks on the Erie floor across all shifts. The line leads showed me that my schedule assumed the dish machine never jammed; it jammed most days. We rebuilt the schedule together, with buffers they chose, and they trained their own crews. When we relaunched in November, it worked, and it was theirs.

At Wharton I will bring that habit to learning teams: slow down, ask who actually does the work, and say when the plan is mine and not ours. I usually speak less in the first ten minutes of a meeting and more after I understand who disagrees.

I will also bring a view of business most classmates have not seen. I can explain how a lunch reaches a cafeteria for under five dollars, and I would like to lead a Food & Agribusiness Club trek to a central kitchen at 4 a.m.

Finally, at the pantry I run the Saturday shift and the bike giveaway. I would like to start a small bike-repair night at Wharton: fixing something together is a good way to meet people.

Optional essay

In spring 2020 my grandfather, who lived with us, was hospitalized for six weeks. I took on more dining shifts and earned a 2.71 that semester, including a C in Thermodynamics. My GPA was 3.4 or higher in each semester afterwards. I retook the GMAT in 2026 to show my quantitative readiness.

Recommenders

- **Laura Brennan** - Vice President of Operations, Keystone School Meals; my direct supervisor since 2025.
- **Tom Kowalczyk** - Plant Manager, Erie kitchen, Keystone School Meals; worked with me during the scheduling rollout and relaunch.