

# Competencies of 21st Century School Nutrition Directors: The District Administrator's Perception



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## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which district administrators and school nutrition (SN) directors perceive that SN directors are adequately prepared in competency areas.

## METHOD

- Previous research by the National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division identified ten functional areas and 23 competencies needed by SN directors to effectively lead their programs in the current environment.
- A survey was developed that asked SN directors and district administrators to respond to the phrase, "Based on my professional experience, district administrators (e.g., superintendent, assistant superintendent, business manager) perceive that SN directors are competent in..." and then indicate their level of agreement with each competency statement using a 4-point scale (1, *strongly disagree* to 4, *strongly agree*).
- Surveys were mailed to random samples of 700 SN directors and 700 district administrators stratified by USDA regions.
- Data analysis included mean, standard deviations, and frequencies of responses.
- Sub-scores were computed for each of the ten functional areas using the supporting competency statements.

## RESULTS

- Survey respondents included 352 SN directors (50%) and 274 district administrators (39%).
- The majority of SN directors were female (84.8%) with both male and female respondents having a Bachelor's degree or higher (55.9%).
- The majority of administrators were male (54.0%) with both males and females having a Master's degree or higher (63.9%).
- SN directors rated 18 of 23 competencies 3.0 or greater and administrators rated 15 of 23 competencies 3.0 or greater indicating agreement that district administrators perceive SN directors are competent in these areas.
- The competencies, "establishing policies and procedures to ensure food is prepared and served in a sanitary and safe environment" and "developing guidelines for planning menus that comply with nutrition objectives and support operational goals of the school nutrition program," received the highest agreement ratings from both groups.
- Competencies with the lowest mean ratings by directors and administrators were similar and included "developing a systematic approach for marketing the school nutrition program," "establishing a communication infrastructure with stakeholders to promote the school nutrition program," and "establishing a comprehensive technology infrastructure to achieve the operational goals of the school nutrition program."
- The functional areas with highest mean ratings from both groups were food production and operation management and menu and nutrition management.

## APPLICATION OF RESULTS

SN programs are growing in complexity and importance. Research-based competencies illustrate these varied responsibilities of SN directors. Study results suggest that resources and training programs may be needed to assist SN directors address those functional areas and competencies that received the lowest mean ratings.

### District Administrators' Perceptions Regarding Competence of SN Directors

#### Mean Agreement Ratings and Standard Deviations for Functional Area Sub-scores

| Functional Area                          | SN Directors <sup>abc</sup><br>Mean ± SD | District Administrators <sup>d</sup><br>Mean ± SD |
|--|--|---|
| Food Production and Operation Management | 3.54 ± 0.61                              | 3.55 ± 0.56                                       |
| Menu and Nutrition Management            | 3.42 ± 0.63                              | 3.41 ± 0.59                                       |
| Financial Management                     | 3.41 ± 0.67                              | 3.40 ± 0.61                                       |
| Food Security, Sanitation, and Safety    | 3.34 ± 0.60                              | 3.34 ± 0.55                                       |
| Procurement and Inventory Management     | 3.32 ± 0.69                              | 3.31 ± 0.60                                       |
| Program Management and Accountability    | 3.31 ± 0.67                              | 3.26 ± 0.68                                       |
| Facilities and Equipment Management      | 3.07 ± 0.72                              | 3.08 ± 0.66                                       |
| Human Resource Management                | 3.04 ± 0.71                              | 2.99 ± 0.73                                       |
| Marketing and Communication              | 2.98 ± 0.75                              | 2.84 ± 0.77                                       |
| Technology and Information Systems       | 2.96 ± 0.87                              | 2.84 ± 0.91                                       |

a Scale = 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*)

b Functional area mean scores presented in descending order based on SN directors' responses

c N varies from 332 to 339

d N varies from 260 to 267