



Insight

A Publication for Child Nutrition Professionals from the National Food Service Management Institute — Spring 2002

Meeting the Needs of Aspiring Child Nutrition Professionals

O Within the National School Lunch Program, a federally assisted meal program operating in more than 97,700 public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions, there is a continuous need for well-qualified Child Nutrition Program (CNP) professionals. The National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) has been meeting the needs of aspiring district school nutrition directors/supervisors through a yearly two-week seminar, *Orientation to Child Nutrition Management*. This intensive program was initiated in 1994 and continues to pursue the goal of providing new and future Child Nutrition Program directors with information essential to the operation of Child Nutrition Programs that are customer-oriented, are cost-effective, and promote healthy eating behaviors. The seminar provides a history and overview of Child Nutrition Programs, defines the role and responsibilities of a director, and reviews the relationships among local policies, and state and federal regulations. Management topics include menu planning, food production and service, nutrition education, marketing, personnel management, procurement, sanitation and safety, and financial

management. The comprehensive seminar is held at the National Food Service Management Institute, located at The University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi. Evaluation of the orientation seminar is an important part of continuous improvement to achieve quality programs that meet the changing needs of participants.

Development of Seminar Structure

Between 1991 and 1993 NFSMI Division of Applied Research initiated a large-scale national study with over 1200 district school nutrition directors/supervisors to identify information on the job functions and tasks required of CNP district directors/supervisors. The goal of the research study was to develop curriculum standards as well as to determine key education activities. In addition, the research study helped identify the functions, competencies, knowledge, and skills required of effective district school nutrition directors/supervisors in Child Nutrition Programs. Based on survey data, personal interviews, and focus groups, the job functions rated most important to a district director's/supervisor's job were customer service, sanitation and safety, financial management and record keeping, food production, procurement, and program accountability. See Table 1 for a complete list of the district directors'/supervisors' ratings of job functions. This research provided the foundation that led to the development of the course content for the *Orientation to Child Nutrition Management Seminar*. From the inception of the

orientation seminar in 1994, it has been the goal of NFSMI to utilize the information gained in the field to develop high-quality seminars that address the most important entry-level functions of district directors/supervisors.



Continued

Evaluation of NFSMI'S Orientation to Child Nutrition Management Seminar

Since the establishment of the seminar in 1994, five two-week seminars were held at NFSMI during June. Announcements and information about the orientation seminars were sent to the state directors for Child Nutrition Programs in the early spring. Information was also disseminated in state CNP newsletters. A survey to evaluate the content and effectiveness of the seminar was initiated in 2000. Individuals who attended seminars held between 1996-2000 were included in the survey process. Participants came from thirty-three states and two territories (American Samoa and Puerto Rico). (See Figure 1.) In addition to representing geographic diversity, the job titles and responsibilities of the participants were diverse. Participants could be classified into three general employment categories ("district/local," "state/territory/federal," and "other") as shown in Figure 2. In order to foster group dynamics, increase networking opportunities, and provide opportunities for hands-on experiences, ideal seminar enrollment was determined to be twenty-five participants.

A wide cadre of professionals including USDA staff, Child Nutrition Program professionals and specialists, expert consultants, NFSMI staff, and university faculty and staff were part of the instructional team over the five-year period. NFSMI staff coordinated the orientation seminars. The wide variety of professional backgrounds and areas of expertise of the instructors is detailed in Table 2.

The orientation seminar also offered participants an option for college credit from The University of Mississippi. Three semester hours of college credit from the Department of

I enjoyed the seminar and was amazed at how much of the information I used in my job on a day-to-day basis. I thought some topics would not apply to my state job but the information I came away with has really helped in advising districts. I really got a lot out of almost all sessions.
 - State Agency Staff

Table 1:
District Directors'/ Supervisors' Ratings of Job Functions In Descending Order of Importance

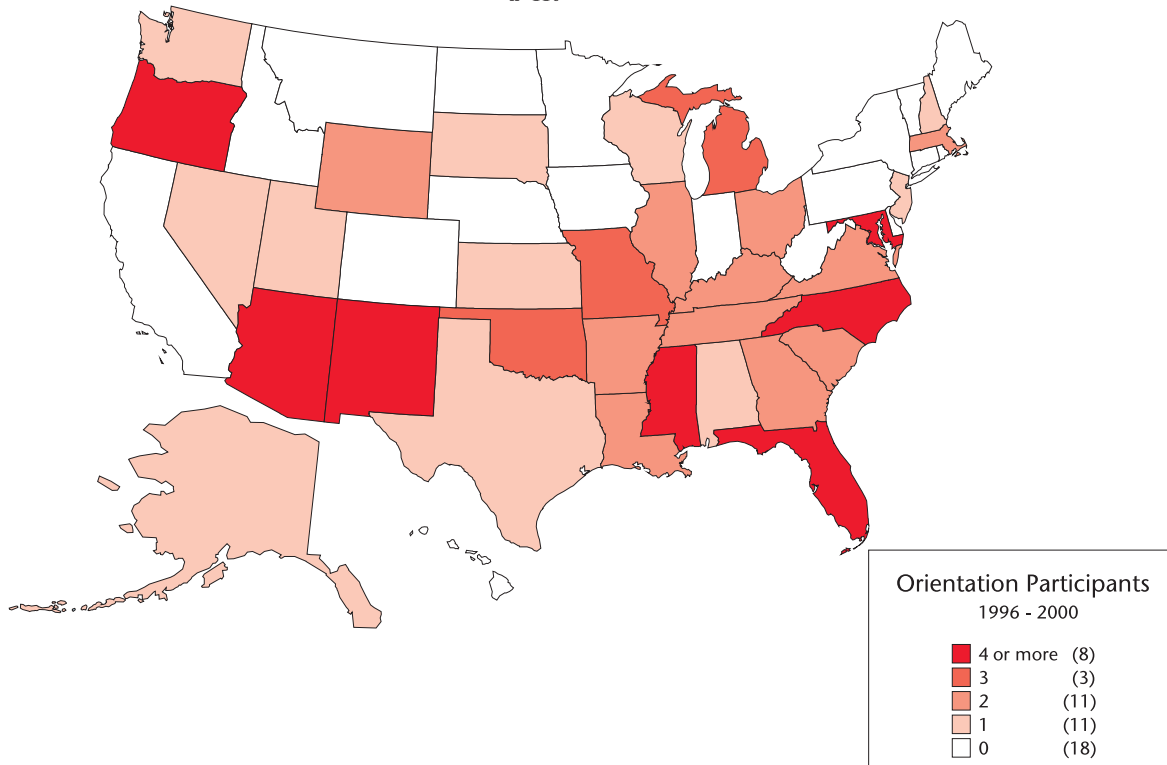
- Service
- Sanitation and Safety
- Financial Management
- Food Production
- Procurement
- Program Accountability
- Nutrition and Meal Planning
- General Management
- Personnel Management
- Equipment
- Research
- Environmental Management
- Marketing
- Computers
- Professional Development
- Nutrition Education

Source:

Conklin, M.T. (1995). Job functions and tasks of school nutrition managers and district directors/supervisors. (NFSMI Insight No. 2). University, MS: National Food Service Management Institute.

Figure 1:

**Participation by State
 Orientation to Child Nutrition Management
 1996 - 2000
 n=110**



Family and Consumer Science could be earned upon satisfactory completion of course requirements. The participants were required to both attend the seminar and participate in additional classroom activities coordinated by an instructor of record. Participants taking the course for college credit were assigned extra-curricular projects and had a separate syllabus for the credit portion of the orientation seminar. Participants taking the course for college credit paid university fees in addition to the orientation seminar registration fees. Generally, between one-quarter and one-third of the participants chose to take the orientation seminar for college credit.

In addition to college credit, the orientation seminars provided continuing education credit. The seminar was approved for continuing education credit from both the American School Food Service Association (ASFSA) and the Dietary Managers Association (DMA). Participants who received college credit could also apply for continuing education hours with the American Dietetic Association (ADA).

Although evaluation of individual sessions immediately following each session of the orientation seminar was an integral part of the program for the entire five years, NFSMI staff felt that a follow-up assessment survey would be beneficial. The objectives of the assessment survey were to determine if the needs of participants were being met and how participants were able to integrate knowledge learned at the orientation seminar into their professional lives. A third goal of the survey was to obtain feedback and ideas for future seminars to support continuous improvement in updating the content and teaching methodology of future orientation seminars.

Evaluation Survey Methodology

A two-page evaluation survey with nine questions and ample space for comments and suggestions was developed. Since the topics, instructors, and order of the topics changed over the five years, the information requested from participants was general in nature. The NFSMI staff reviewed the original list of 110 participants to eliminate individuals who were no longer in the field. An introductory letter, the evaluation survey, and a return postage-paid envelope were mailed in December 2000 to 108 potential respondents. Thirty-five participants responded to the survey for a response rate of 33%. Three envelopes were returned as undeliverable.

I enjoy the seminar and hope to return to another seminar as soon as I can.
- School Food Service Manager

Figure 2:

Employment Categories of Participants 1996 - 2000

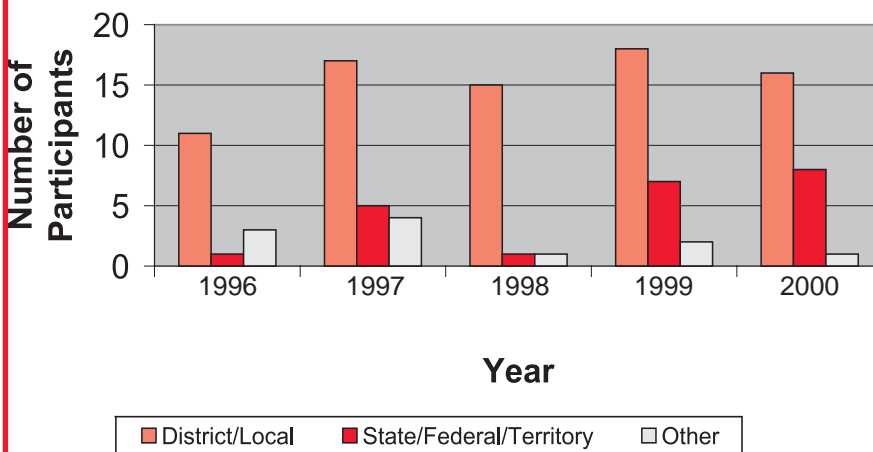


Table 2:

Professional Background and Areas of Expertise of Instructors

USDA Staff: Food and Nutrition Services Program Analyst and Program Specialist

Expert Consultants: Child Nutrition Program Consultant, Food and Equipment Industry Representative, and School District Superintendent

CNP Professionals and Specialists: Nutrition Services Director, Food Service Administrator, Food Service Supervisor, School Food Service Director, Child Nutrition Program Director, and Child Nutrition Program State Director

University Staff: Special Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Staff Development, Associate Dean of Students, Educational Leadership Instructor and Associate Professor, Broadcast News Coordinator, Journalism Instructor, Business Administration Associate Professor, Educational Psychology Associate Professor, Office of Research - Program Development Specialist, and Food Science and Technology Chair

Evaluation Survey Results

Using the same categories described in Figure 2, 25 (71%) of the respondents were classified as “district/local”. Of these 25 respondents, 20 identified themselves as school food service directors, assistant directors, or supervisors; and five identified themselves as school food service managers. The remaining ten respondents were classified as state agency staff (6), child care providers (2), and “other” (2).

Respondents indicated they applied information from 1 to 24 sessions in their professional employment with an average of nine topics being used. The most often cited topic was Federal CNP. The next five most frequently reported topics were personnel management, menu planning, nutrient analysis, financial management, and safety/sanitation. Reported application of other topics into the participant’s professional employment is shown in Table 3. Twenty-four of the respondents had used more than seven topics.

Thirty-one respondents checked the topics that they felt should always be included in the seminar. Interestingly, the topics that

Table 4:	
Seminar Topics Identified as “Always Include”	
Seminar Topics	Number of Respondents
Financial Management	31
Personnel Management	30
Purchasing	29
Federal CNP	27
Menu Planning	25
Safety and Sanitation	23
Nutrient Analysis	22
Peoplewise Management	21
Customer Satisfaction	20
Marketing	20
Equipment/Facility Planning	19
Production/Culinary Techniques	19
Professional Growth	18
Communication	16
Leadership	16
Managing Change	16
Procedure Manual	15
Director’s Panel	14
History	12
Internet	12
Resources	9
Cultural Diversity	8
Environmental Management	7
Research	4

were most often cited as “always” to be included in the orientation seminar differed somewhat from those topics that were most often used. The top three topics to “always include” were financial management, personnel management, and purchasing. Table 4 provides more detail. A wide variety of other topics were suggested. See suggestions on back panel.

Upon analysis of the responses based on employment categories, several differences were observed. The district/local participants were subdivided into directors/supervisors and managers. More often the directors/supervisors were interested in topics related to financial management and budgets, cost control, and dealing with employees. Managers were more interested in specifically identifying activities and/or training modules for their employees. In general the participants that fell in the category “state, federal or territory” felt that a session for new and continuing state agency staff would be helpful.

There are situations which arise on a daily basis where I must rely on information gained from the seminar. The staff was sensitive and ready to help. - School Food Service Director

I was so pleased this was offered. I learned a lot and met many wonderful people. This was just what I needed before my 1st year as director of food service. The time of 2 weeks was a wonderful time allotted for the material presented. Thank you so much! - School Food Service Director

Table 3:

Topics Applied in Professional Employment

Seminar Topics	Number of Respondents
Federal CNP	21
Personnel Management	20
Menu Planning	20
Nutrient Analysis	19
Financial Management	18
Safety and Sanitation	18
Purchasing	16
Marketing	15
Customer Satisfaction	14
Production/Culinary Techniques	13
Equipment/Facility Planning	12
Communication	11
Peoplewise Management	11
Cultural Diversity	10
Internet	10
Professional Growth	10
Procedure Manual	9
Director’s Panel	8
History	8
Leadership	8
Managing Change	7
Resources	6
Environmental Management	5
Research	5

Suggested Orientation Seminar Topics

- **service contracts for repairmen**
- **kitchen equipment in depth**
- **studies on paper versus washing dishes**
- **remodeling old kitchens**
- **cooking space needed per student number**
- **creativity in student learning tools**
- **human resources (role playing)**
- **audits and reviews (federal and state)**
- **production planning**
- **financial responsibility (workers)**
- **nutrient analysis or financial concerns**
- **handling situations for employees and public**
- **financial claims**
- **production records**
- **inventory management**
- **motivating employees**
- **recipe development**
- **customer relations**
- **sanitation and safety**
- **policy versus recommendation**
- **child care administration**
- **outsourcing**
- **state agency staff session**
- **break-even analysis**
- **budgets**
- **privatization**
- **charter schools**
- **centralized kitchen via satellite**

Implications

As a result of the survey, specific changes were implemented for the 2001 seminar. Additional hands-on and/or breakout sessions was a frequent suggestion. Thirty-three percent of the respondents made this request.

Based on this suggestion, hands-on activities or breakout sessions were added to nine sessions. The hands-on experiences included case study reports, cost control, communication labs, environmental management, financial management, menu planning, procurement, program requirements, and production/culinary techniques.

Another notable suggestion was a pre-seminar survey to be sent to participants to discover background and experiences as well as determine recommendations for topics to be explored in greater depth at the orientation seminar. In response to this suggestion, a pre-seminar survey was developed and sent in advance to participants to obtain background information and questions to be addressed at the 2001 seminar. Instructors were given advance information of the participants' backgrounds and requested topics to be discussed such as technology, nutrient analysis, personnel management, financial management, and nutrition education.

To identify potential methods to enhance access to the orientation information, questions were asked regarding topics that could be made available through self-directed learning or other strategies. Survey responses were mixed concerning suggested topics which were suitable for Internet, CD-ROM, print, or video. Comments on providing distance learning topics through technology from the seminar were also mixed. Only three participants thought the entire orientation could be delivered by distance, while other participants thought some sessions could be delivered by distance.

*I really enjoyed meeting the people and your staff. I always can gain from friendships and new resources in my field.
Thanks. - Child Care Provider*

I enjoyed every minute and wished it was longer. - School Food Service Manager

Future Plans

Continuous improvement of the orientation seminar is an important goal of the National Food Service Management Institute. Seminar participant ideas contributed to many improvements including: enhanced access of educational materials and resources such as PowerPoint presentations available on NFSMI Web site, distance learning on-line

courses, revision of the functions and competencies of school foodservice directors and monitoring future trends related to Child Nutrition Programs. NFSMI continues to explore strategies to enhance access to this information for new and aspiring CNP directors. For the date of the next orientation seminar, check the Web site: www.nfsmi.org.



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Information about this and other topics may be obtained by contacting the

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Telephone: 800-321-3054

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AUTHOR: Melba Hollingsworth, MS, RD, Education and Training Specialist, and Marilyn A. Swanson, PhD, RD, Director of Education and Training, Education Division, National Food Service Management Institute, The University of Mississippi, University, MS.

EDITOR: Denise M. Brown, PhD, RD, LD, Director, Applied Research Division, National Food Service Management Institute, located at the University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS.

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