

Report on the Development of a Parent Foodservice Survey for Young Children



National Food Service Management Institute
The University of Mississippi

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Building the Future Through Child Nutrition

The National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) was authorized by Congress in 1989 and established in 1990 at The University of Mississippi in Oxford. The Institute operates under a grant agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

PURPOSE

The purpose of NFSMI is to improve the operation of Child Nutrition Programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination. The Administrative Offices and Divisions of Technology Transfer and Education and Training are located in Oxford. The Division of Applied Research is located at The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

MISSION

The mission of the NFSMI is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of Child Nutrition Programs.

VISION

The vision of the NFSMI is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in Child Nutrition Programs.

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REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PARENT FOODSERVICE SURVEY FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every day children receive nutritious meals and snacks through the Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP). Although research indicates that young children are likely to meet their nutrient needs, parents continue to express concern about their children's dietary habits (Stanek, Abbott, & Cramer, 1990). Because parents of children attending child care centers are the customers of CACFP, a research study was designed to provide child care directors with a valid and reliable survey instrument to assess the parents' perception of the meals, snacks, and the eating environment of child care centers participating in CACFP.

A review of the literature, focus groups, and researchers' experience were used to develop survey questions. The survey was composed of 40 questions measured on a seven-point scale with 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree and an additional option of "I don't know." A total of ten day care and Head Start programs representing each of the seven USDA regions were selected to participate in the study. Researchers contacted each center director by telephone to confirm willingness to participate and procedures for distributing surveys. Directors were then sent a letter with 30 surveys to distribute to parents of children attending the center. A letter that introduced the Applied Research Division (ARD) of the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) and the purpose of the study was also included for parents.

Of the 300 surveys distributed, 177 were returned from seven sites representing a return rate of 59%. The final survey was developed using principle component analysis with varimax rotation. The final model was composed of 20 questions and four factors with Cronbach alpha

levels ranging from .836 to .908. The factors are described as Meals (.901), Information (.836), Preparing for Meals (.908), and Nutrition (.865).

Multiple linear regression was used to determine what variables predict satisfaction. The question used as the dependent variable was *Overall, I like the foods my child is served*. The independent variables were all other questions in the model created through factor analysis. Four questions were found to be significant predictors of satisfaction [$F(20, 51) = 9.75, p < .001, R^2 = .793$]. They were: (9) *My child receives a variety of foods*, (12) *Children are encouraged to try new foods*, (25) *Children are encouraged to eat rather than play during meal times*, and (37) *Parents are welcome to eat with their children*.

The ARD study did produce a model through factor analysis with four highly reliable factors that can be used to assess parents' perceptions of the meals, snacks, and the eating environment provided by child care and Head Start programs nationwide operated under CACFP.