



# JOB FUNCTIONS AND TASKS OF SCHOOL NUTRITION MANAGERS AND DISTRICT DIRECTORS/SUPERVISORS

A PUBLICATION FOR CHILD NUTRITION PROFESSIONALS FROM THE NATIONAL FOOD SERVICE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

## OVERVIEW

Researchers at the National Food Service Management Institute conducted two national surveys to determine the functions and tasks associated with management positions in Child Nutrition Programs. The job functions rated most important to the position of school nutrition manager were program accountability, sanitation and safety, customer service, equipment use and care, and food production. The job functions rated most important to a district director/supervisor's job were customer service, sanitation and safety, financial management and record keeping, food production, procurement, and program accountability. With both positions, the job functions rated as most important also tended to be performed more frequently. CNP personnel involved in recruitment and training can use this information to focus on the job essentials and priorities. Training materials that focus on many important job functions are discussed.

## JOB FUNCTIONS AND TASKS OF SCHOOL NUTRITION MANAGERS

The blue line in *Figure 1* depicts the perceived importance of job functions associated with the role of school nutrition manager. The importance ratings for job functions were calculated by averaging the importance ratings of all tasks listed under each job function. All twelve job functions had average ratings of **somewhat important** to **very important**. The five most important job functions in descending order were program accountability, sanitation and safety, service, equipment use and care, and food production. *Figure 2* lists specific tasks rated as **very important** to the job of school nutrition manager for each of the five most important job functions.

## RESEARCH

Qualified employees are the keys to effective Child Nutrition Programs (CNP). Educators define competence as the ability to perform tasks and assume the role of a specified job with the required knowledge, skills, and abilities. Determining the functions and tasks of a job is an important first step in achieving the goal of building a qualified staff. This is particularly true concerning management positions within CNPs because school nutrition managers and district directors/supervisors set the standards for performance on a daily basis. The quality of CNPs is determined by the competence of management staff.

The American School Food Service Association (ASFSFA) first published specific job functions and tasks of school nutrition managers and district directors/supervisors in 1979. They were updated, validated, and republished in 1984. Little research had been done since then to examine the impact of current events on these management positions.

At the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI), we initiated two large-scale national studies in 1991-93 to provide current information on the job functions and tasks required of CNP school nutrition managers and district director/supervisors. Results would serve as a basis for developing curriculum standards as well as continuing education activities by the NFSMI.

### OBJECTIVES

*Specific objectives were to:*

- determine the perceived importance of job functions and tasks to the management positions of school nutrition manager and district director/supervisor and
- learn how frequently job tasks were performed.

### METHOD

Questionnaires listing job functions and tasks of school nutrition managers and district directors/supervisors were mailed to a random list of individuals who currently worked in one of these

management positions. Four hundred and ninety-nine managers responded to the questionnaire listing job functions and tasks of a school nutrition manager. Six hundred and sixteen directors/supervisors responded to the questionnaire listing the functions and tasks associated with their job.

Each type of CNP management staff evaluated the importance of the tasks to their job using a rating scale ranging from **not important** to **very important**. In addition, respondents indicated how frequently they performed the tasks using a rating scale with five alternatives: **never, periodically, monthly, weekly, and daily**.

The two job functions rated the highest were those related to survival of CNPs. Managers must assure that their operations meet all government regulations or the CNP will be penalized. This also holds true for the function of sanitation and safety. Health codes must be met, and work places must be safe because of potential health department penalties and Workers' Compensation claims. It also should be noted that the 1994 government regulations concerning implementation of the U.S. Dietary Guidelines have undoubtedly elevated the importance of the nutrition and menu planning function to the level of program accountability.

Customer service was rated the next most important function after the two associated with basic survival of CNPs. Managers recognized that service to the customer is vital to the

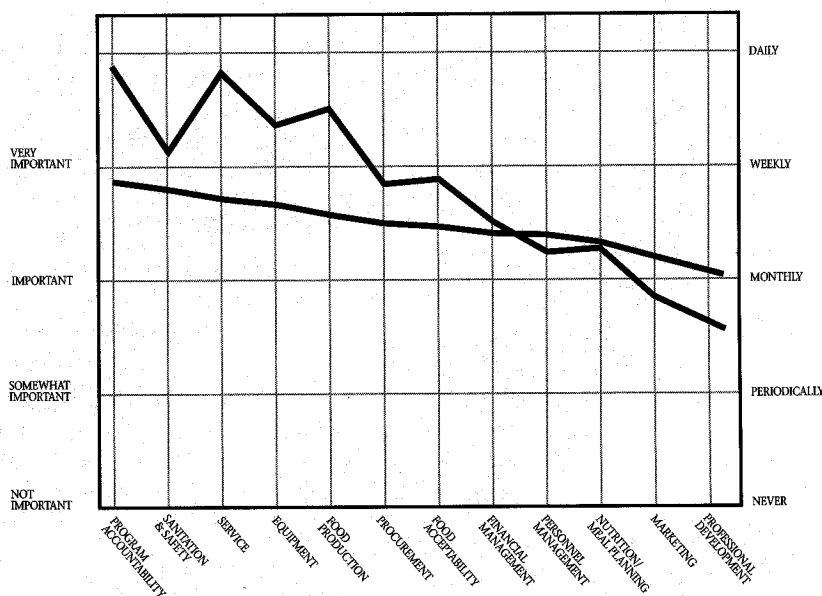
success of CNPs. As noted in *Figure 2*, serving food at the correct temperatures, operating a serving line in a prompt and courteous manner, and encouraging employees to be pleasant and helpful are all very important to the job of school nutrition manager.

How frequently job functions were performed is shown by the red line in *Figure 1*. Frequency of performance of job functions was calculated by averaging the frequency of performance ratings of tasks associated with each job function. The five highest job functions were performed at least weekly and program accountability and service functions were performed almost daily. Only marketing and professional development functions were performed less than monthly.

FIGURE 1

### SCHOOL NUTRITION MANAGERS' RATINGS OF THE IMPORTANCE AND FREQUENCY OF THEIR JOB FUNCTIONS

■ IMPORTANCE  
■ FREQUENCY



## MANAGERS RECOGNIZE THAT SERVICE TO THE CUSTOMER IS VITAL TO THE SUCCESS OF CNPs

### JOB FUNCTIONS AND TASKS OF DISTRICT DIRECTORS/SUPERVISORS

The blue line in *Figure 3* illustrates the perceived importance ratings for job functions of the CNP district directors/supervisors. The importance ratings of the job functions were calculated by averaging the importance ratings of all tasks listed under each function of the district director/supervisor's job. The 16 functional areas of this management position are listed in descending order of importance. Most functions were rated **important** to **very important**. The six most important job functions were customer service, sanitation and safety, financial management and record keeping, food production, procurement, and program accountability. Six functions are listed instead of five because the last two were given equal ratings by district directors/supervisors responding to the survey. Specific tasks rated **very important** to the job of district director/supervisor under each of the six most important job functions are listed in *Figure 4*.

Program accountability was perceived as one of the very important functions of a director/supervisor's job, yet its rating was not the highest as found in the survey of school nutrition managers. Perhaps this is due to the fact that by the time district directors/supervisors assume their management positions, procedures for program compliance and accountability have become routine. Although responsibility for program accountability remains with the director/supervisor, the daily attention to these details may be delegated to others. As with the school nutrition manager's position, the nutrition and menu planning and nutrition education functions

of the district director/supervisor's job have been elevated in importance, at least to the level of program accountability, by recent USDA regulations.

The most important function rated by district directors/supervisors responding to this survey was customer service. Very important tasks associated with service were developing standards for prompt, courteous, and efficient service; evaluating the efficiency of the serving area and serving methods; and communicating standards of service to employees (*Figure 4*). By rating service so highly, district directors/supervisors demonstrated that they understood the importance of seeing students as customers whose needs must be met in order to achieve effective CNPs.

The red line in *Figure 3* illustrates the frequency of performance ratings of each job function. Frequency of performance of job functions was calculated by averaging the frequency ratings of tasks associated with each job function. No job functions were performed on a daily basis. The highest frequency of performance was found with the functions of customer service and food production. Most were performed on a monthly or periodic basis. Such findings suggest that district directors/supervisors need to be capable of performing a wide variety of tasks and must be flexible enough to deal with the potential of performing different tasks each day. These findings emphasize the need for educational preparation and continuing professional development in a broad range of areas.

FIGURE 2

PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY

- Follows federal, state, and local regulations
- Prevents discrimination by protecting the identity of students receiving free and reduced-price meals

SANITATION AND SAFETY

- Practices and enforces personal hygiene
- Maintains sanitation standards for equipment, personnel, food, and facility
- Controls insects and rodents
- Follows safety standards for equipment, personnel, food, and facility
- Follows procedures to maintain safe and sanitary conditions in the storage, preparation, and service of food

CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Serves food at correct temperatures
- Operates serving line with prompt, courteous, and efficient service
- Maintains a serving line with proper conditions (*for example, time and temperature*) to keep nutritive value of foods

- Encourages employees to be pleasant and helpful when serving meals, exchanging monies, and maintaining facilities
- Improves food service by making sure the dining and kitchen areas are clean and attractive

EQUIPMENT USE AND CARE

- Maintains safety standards
- Trains employees to use safety precautions when operating and cleaning equipment
- Reports faulty operation of equipment
- Monitors cleaning and maintenance of large equipment
- Supervises employees in the proper use and care of equipment

FOOD PRODUCTION

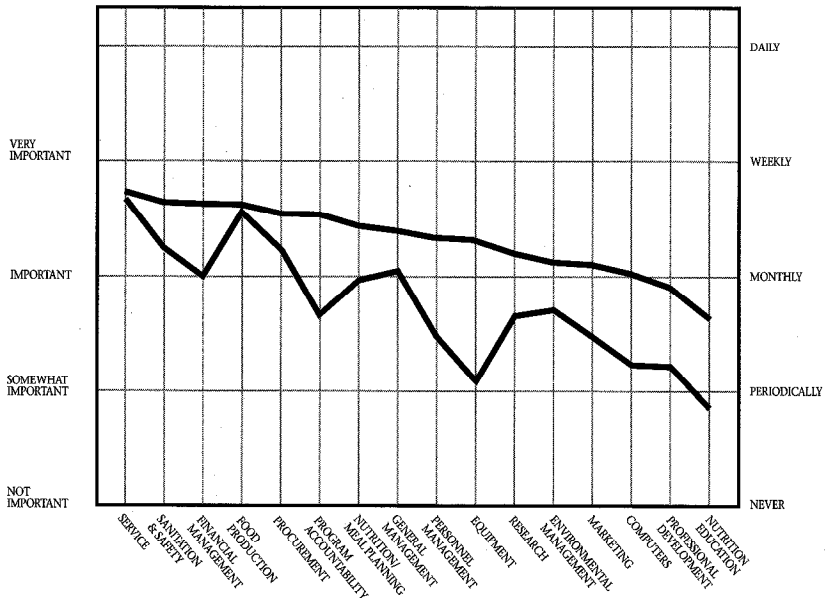
- Directs the preparation of foods that taste good and are nutritious
- Maintains daily menu and food production records
- Monitors effectiveness of food production, distribution, and service procedures
- Sets up and maintains standards for control of quality and quantity food production and distribution
- Monitors and improves productivity

Figure 2. Job Tasks Rated as "Very Important" by School Nutrition Managers for the Five Most Important Functions of their job

FIGURE 3

DISTRICT  
DIRECTORS/SUPERVISORS'  
RATINGS OF THE  
IMPORTANCE AND FREQUENCY  
OF THEIR JOB FUNCTIONS

- IMPORTANCE
- FREQUENCY



## COMPARING THE JOB OF SCHOOL NUTRITION MANAGER TO DISTRICT DIRECTOR/SUPERVISOR

Differences exist in the roles of school nutrition manager and district director/supervisor. The role of district director/supervisor is more complex, 16 job functions versus 12 for the school nutrition manager, and they are performed with less consistency. Managers have greater daily operational responsibilities than directors/ supervisors. Managers are supervising, overseeing, and coordinating school-level CNP activities, and they collect information for decision making at the district level. Director/supervisor's responsibilities involve planning, coordination, and administration of the CNP for the entire district.

Figure 5 compares similar job functions of the district director/supervisor to those of the school nutrition manager.

This comparison is made only on the ten broad functions each position had in common, and the exact tasks under each job function differed depending on the level of management involved. In general, the school nutrition managers rated the functions of their job (blue line) as more important than directors/supervisors rated similar job functions (red line). An exception is found with the functions of financial management and record keeping and nutrition and menu planning. Directors/supervisors rated these two functions as more important to their job than managers rated these functions for the job of school nutrition manager.

## CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Develops standards for prompt, courteous, and efficient service
- Evaluates efficiency of serving area
- Establishes quality standards in the presentation, merchandising, taste, and service of food
- Evaluates serving methods to assure students are served quickly
- Recommends solutions to problems with the service of food

## SANITATION AND SAFETY

- Facilitates development of sanitation procedures and cleaning schedules
- Ensures proper storage and handling of chemicals and cleaning supplies
- Maintains an effective insect and rodent control system Establishes safety standards and rules
- Monitors food service unit compliance with health and safety rules established by federal (OSHA), state, and local agencies
- Considers safety requirements when ordering equipment

## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND RECORD KEEPING

- Operates program within budget
- Implements control in all cost categories (*e.g. labor, food, supply, operating*)
- Establishes financial objectives for the food service operation
- Supervises free and reduced-price meal applications and verification process
- Establishes a system to assure food service fiscal accountability

## FOOD PRODUCTION

- Evaluates food quality
- Establishes procedures to ensure appropriate temperatures of foods during preparation, transportation, and service

- Establishes procedures for portion control Delegates authority and responsibility for food production and service to unit managers and assistants
- Establishes procedures to provide and preserve maximum nutritional value of food
- Works with unit managers to evaluate the food production system and food quality, and revises the system as needed to improve operations

## PROCUREMENT

- Determines the type and quantity of food and supplies to be purchased based on student needs and resources available
- Maintains a system for proper storage and distribution of food and supplies throughout the district
- Ensures that food, supplies, and equipment are purchased to meet specifications
- Maintains a purchasing system consistent with USDA and state purchasing guidelines
- Establishes a purchasing system to secure food and supplies used by district food service units

## PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY

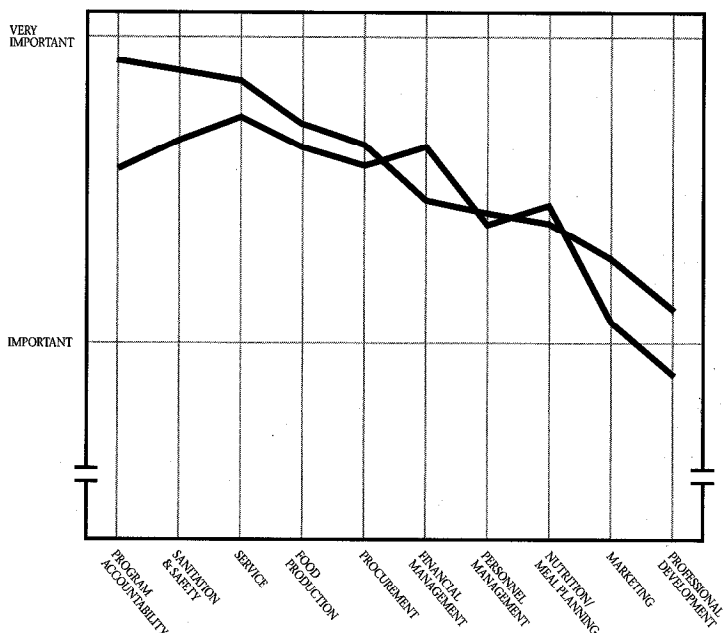
- Assesses program compliance with federal, state, and local regulations
- Revises school food service program operations based on changes in federal, state, and/or local regulations
- Informs administrative staff and school food service program personnel of federal, state, and local government regulations that affect program operations
- Communicates changes to school food service personnel
- Cooperates with federal agencies and personnel responsible for the administration and review of district food service programs

Figure 4. Job Tasks Rated as "Very Important" by District Directors/Supervisors for the Five Most Important Functions of their job.

# FIGURE 5

## COMPARISON OF DISTRICT DIRECTORS'/SUPERVISORS' TO SCHOOL NUTRITION MANAGERS' JOB FUNCTION IMPORTANCE RATINGS

- MANAGERS' IMPORTANCE RATINGS
- DISTRICT DIRECTORS' IMPORTANCE RATINGS



When considering the practical implications of these studies, it is important to consider the period of time in which the studies were done. The study on job functions and tasks for school nutrition managers was conducted in 1991, and the survey of district directors/supervisors was completed in 1993. The emphasis on nutrition education, nutrition integrity, and the implementation of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans was rising in importance at this time, but the impact was not as great as it is today. Other gaps may appear in the research when it is evaluated in terms of the current climate of CNPs. The professional using these findings should look for gaps in the perceptions of CNP management staff, as reflected by these studies, and consider adding other job tasks as appropriate.

## JOB SPECIFICATIONS AND RECRUITMENT

An obvious use of this research is to provide documentation of the complex job functions and tasks involved in the management positions of school nutrition manager and district director/supervisor. The validity of this documentation is supported by the research method which surveyed a nationwide group of individuals working in these positions.

Knowledge of the important functions of a job can be used to develop job specifications that list the knowledge and skills required of persons performing in these roles. Discussion of these functions can enlighten school administrators to the demands of these management positions, and perhaps this insight will help to assure justification for increasing educational requirements and compensation for job candidates.

## JOB DESCRIPTIONS

The list of job functions can be used to develop job descriptions that prioritize functions and tasks into major and minor categories. This will give school nutrition managers and district directors/supervisors an understanding of the relative importance of the multitude of tasks they must accomplish each day.

## ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

When providing orientation to newly hired school nutrition managers, district directors/supervisors might focus on job functions found to be most important to the role of manager and most frequently performed. Topics to include would be program accountability (nutritional and financial), sanitation and safety, customer service, equipment use and care, and food production. These are logical issues to cover in orientation, but directors/supervisors should gain additional confidence from the fact that their evaluation of pertinent topics is supported by research. The same would hold true for orientation programs for new district directors/supervisors sponsored by state departments of education or community colleges.

The importance of job functions and tasks, as perceived by people actually performing the jobs, can be used to

build a curriculum for entry-level as well as continuing professional education of CNP management staff. Foundation and refresher courses should be based on the basic knowledge and skills required to perform the important tasks associated with job functions that were rated **very important** and were performed frequently. As management staff gain more experience and confidence on the job, additional continuing education courses should be offered to help develop skills with importance to the job, but performed less frequently such as marketing.

CNP professionals should network within the state to define and provide training programs for entry-level and continuing education needs. State Departments of Education and colleges and universities working together can provide the programs needed for professional growth.

## SERVICE EMPHASIS

Customer service appears to be perceived by both school nutrition managers and district directors/supervisors as a major function. This suggests that students are no longer seen as captive audiences, but rather as customers. School nutrition managers and district directors/supervisors must focus more attention on strategies for obtaining student input to CNPs in order to meet their needs. Nutrition Advisory Committees (NACs) are examples of this principle at work in many schools. By focusing on meeting student needs, higher levels of customer satisfaction with CNPs and increased participation will become a reality.

## NFSMI CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The NFSMI used the results of these studies to develop knowledge and skill statements required of competent CNP management staff. The knowledge and skills necessary for school nutrition managers and district director/supervisors will be validated by CNP practitioners in 1995. This information will be used to develop curriculum standards for entry-level and advanced level CNP professionals. These studies also were referenced by the ASFSa when reviewing the certification requirements for managers and directors.

## NFSMI RESOURCES

NFSMI has been in the forefront in developing and/or distributing training materials targeted to school nutrition managers. Many of these focus on job functions and tasks that were rated as **very important**. Breakfast, Lunch Training (BLT) packages include educational materials and videos designed to achieve specific training objectives. *"Recognizing Reimbursable School Lunches"* trains managers and food service assistants about the essentials of program accountability. *"Go for the Gold"* presents concepts in customer satisfaction, and *"On the Road to Professional Food Preparation"* focuses on key concepts and techniques required of food production workers. For more information about resources, check the NFSMI Publications Guide listed in the next section.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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### RESEARCH ARTICLES AND PROCEEDINGS:

Conklin, M.T., Sneed, J., & Martin, J. (1995). Preparing Child Nutrition professionals for the 21st century. *School Food Service Research Review*, 19, in press.

Gregoire, M.B., & Sneed, J. (1994a). Competencies for district school nutrition directors/supervisors. *School Food Service Research Review*, 18, 89-99.

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Sneed, J., & White, K. T. (1993a). Continuing education needs of school-level managers in Child Nutrition Programs. *School Food Service Research Review*, 17, 103-108.

Sneed, J., & White, K.T. (1993b). Development and validation of competency statements for managers in school food service. *School Food Service Research Review*, 17, 50-61.

### VIDEO AND TRAINING MATERIALS:

NFSMI. Managing Child Nutrition Programs, NFSMITT070194, University, MS: author.

NFSMI. On the road to professional food preparation, NFSMI ET5-93, University, MS: author.

NFSMI. Participation: The key to healthy food practices, NFSMITT030994, University, MS: author.

NFSMI. Preparation and the Dietary Guidelines, NFSMITT020393, University, MS: author.

NFSMI. Promoting healthy food practices, NFSMITT042893, University, MS: author.

NFSMI. Publications Guide: National Food Service Management Institute, University, MS: author.

NFSMI. Recognizing reimbursable school lunches, NFSMI ET1-91(A), University, MS: author.

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

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