



# Insight

A Publication for Child Nutrition Professionals from the National Food Service Management Institute — Spring 2004

## Revised Competencies, Knowledge, and Skill Statements for School Nutrition Managers

**O** As one looks over the landscape of school nutrition programs in the United States, it is apparent that there have been many changes in the programs since the creation of the National School Lunch Act of 1946. School Nutrition Programs (SNP) operating within the guidelines of the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program are faced with many forms of accountability and environmental changes. In today's world, school nutrition programs operate as businesses within an educational setting, and those who administer the programs must be prepared to face the challenges. Constantly, there is an ongoing need to review, explore, and revise the competencies, knowledge, and skills needed for school nutrition managers, individuals who manage the school nutrition program at the local school site. The ability to descriptively characterize the competencies, knowledge, and skills for these professionals provides essential information for selecting, developing, and mentoring future school nutrition managers.

Researchers at the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI), Applied Research Division initiated a three-phase research project to revise the competencies, knowledge, and skill statements of school nutrition managers and determine the knowledge and skill statements that are essential for entry level and beyond entry-level to reflect the current environment to which they perform their daily job duties. The 1995 version of *Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills of Effective School Nutrition Managers* served as the foundation for the revision.

In 2002-2003 a national panel of school nutrition professionals evaluated the 1995 version of the competency, knowledge, and skill statements as they apply to today's environment in school nutrition programs. Upon review of the data and following recommendations of the study participants, the document was revised to reflect their input. The updated version of the document will assist NFSMI, USDA, state agencies, and training professionals in

developing appropriate resources for expanding the professional development opportunities of school nutrition managers. This information will also assist school systems and professional organizations in establishing personnel standards or credentialing requirements. School administrators can use this document and the Sample Job Description Template in preparing job descriptions for school nutrition managers.

The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Institutional Review Board approved the protocol for the research study. Participation in the study was voluntary.

### **METHODS**

#### **PHASE I**

##### **Survey Development and Distribution**

- Developed a mail survey instrument, using the 12 functional areas and 479 knowledge/skill statements identified in the original 1995 publication, to determine relevance (not important, somewhat important, vital, and extremely important) of the statements to job responsibilities performed by school nutrition managers in today's environment and identify the knowledge and skills required of entry-level school nutrition managers as distinct from knowledge and skills acquired on the job (beyond entry-level).
- Identified four different geographic areas representing 20 states from which to select study participants.
- Contacted state agency child nutrition directors from the selected states to provide a listing of names and demographic information of child nutrition managers and directors participating in the National School Lunch Program to serve as potential study participants.
- Selected study participants from the pool of names provided based on their demographic information and willingness to participate in the study.
- Mailed a letter and a 12-part survey instrument to 38 participants from 20 states representing managers, directors, and state agency staff, that was to be completed and returned.

## PHASE II

### Work Group Sessions

- Conducted four two-day regional work sessions in Baltimore, Omaha, Knoxville, and Phoenix.
- Invited 38 nutrition professionals that responded to the mail survey, representing 20 states.
- Reviewed and validated the survey results, using consensus building steps.
- Reviewed knowledge and skill statements challenged by a majority of respondents as “not important” or “somewhat important,” for relevance to current job responsibilities.
- Conducted a consensus building activity to revise, delete, or leave reviewed statements as written in the original document.
- Reviewed experience level designation (entry and beyond-entry) to current work environment of those statements generating a 50% or less agreement response.
- Performed a Gap Analysis exercise to determine content areas requiring new statements needed for today’s work environment.

## PHASE III

### Document Revision

- Compiled recommendations from the four work group sessions.
- Confirmed and validated suggested recommendations with study participants.

## RESULTS

### PHASE I

#### Survey Development and Distribution

- Participants generated a 100% response to the 12-part mailed survey.
- Analyses of the survey questionnaires were conducted and the regional findings were established to present during each of the four work group sessions.

### PHASE II

#### Work Group Sessions

- Thirty-eight child nutrition professionals participated in one of four regional work group sessions, with representation from five states at each session.
- Participants discussed the survey results of their region.
- Participants reviewed experience level for each knowledge and skill statement based on survey results of their region.
- Gap Analysis was performed on manager’s job responsibilities in today’s environment, identifying six new content areas (crisis/risk management, food recall/food safety, cultural diversity in the labor force, diets for special needs children, technology, and strategic planning).
- Participants challenged a total of 206 knowledge/skill

statements for further review, as being either “not important” or only “somewhat important” to the job responsibilities of school nutrition managers.

- Participants recommended modification of the title for Functional Area 3, changing from *Sanitation and Safety* to *Sanitation, Safety, and Security*.
- No new functional areas were identified.

### PHASE III

#### Finalizing Revised Document

- Developed an instrument to validate the 206 challenged knowledge/skill statements.
- Mailed validation instrument to the participants requesting their preferred choice of action (modify, delete, or leave as written) for the challenged statements, in addition to the appropriate experience level (entry- or beyond-entry level).
- Thirty-four (89%) participants completed and returned the instrument.
- After review of the 206 challenged knowledge/skill statements from the original document, 138 remained unchanged, 47 were modified or rewritten, and 22 were deleted.
- Consensus of the review recommendation reduced the original number of statements from 479 to 457.
- Recommendation regarding experience levels resulted in 323 (71%) entry-level knowledge/skill statements and 134 (29%) beyond entry-level statements.
- Developed a tool to confirm the new competency, knowledge, and skill statements of the six content areas for inclusion in the revised document.
- Mailed the tool to ten panel members, representing the four geographic regions, state agency representative, and NFSMI scholar.
- Six panel members (60%) reviewed and returned the new statements.
- Findings confirmed a need for four new competency statements and 69 new knowledge and skill statements.
- Respondents reached consensus that 21 (30%) of the new statements were entry-level and 48 (70%) statements were beyond-entry level.
- Study findings described 12 functional areas and 526 knowledge and skill statements (Table 1).
- Study findings described 35 competencies within the 12 functional areas (Table 2).
- Study findings identified job performance level of the 526 statements as 344 entry level and 182 beyond-entry level (Table 3).
- Developed Sample Job Description Template based on the functional areas and competencies identified as essential to performing the job of a school nutrition manager (Figure 1).

Figure 1

# SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION TEMPLATE

## School Nutrition Manager General Function and Scope

The school nutrition manager is defined as an individual designated by the school district to oversee and manage the food service operation in a local school, having an accountability relationship with the school nutrition director/administrator. The job functions include nutrition and menu planning; program accountability; sanitation, safety, and security; equipment use and care; procurement; food production; food acceptability; service; financial management and recordkeeping; marketing; personnel management; and professional development. The school nutrition manager shall partner with others in the local school, school district, and community to solicit support for the development of a sound nutrition assistance food program while following federal, state, and local guidelines. The local school nutrition operation is to provide an environment that supports healthy food habits while maintaining program integrity and customer satisfaction.

### ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONAL AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITIES

#### NUTRITION AND MENU PLANNING

- Provides an atmosphere that ensures the purpose of the School Nutrition Program (SNP) to “safeguard the health and well-being of the nation’s children.”
- Ensures all meals served in the SNP meet current nutritional standards and meal pattern requirements, including children with special need diets.
- Maintains nutritional integrity of the SNP through implementation of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.
- Plans and provides menus that encourage student consumption.
- Establishes leadership role in providing nutrition education as part of the total school education program.

#### PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY

- Maintains integrity and accountability of the SNP through compliance with all federal, state, and local regulations.
- Ensures accountability of recorded documentation for compliance with federal, state, and local regulations.
- Ensures compliance with school/school district mission and/or vision statements.

#### SANITATION, SAFETY, AND SECURITY

- Provides an environment conducive to protecting the health and well-being of the school’s children through high levels of sanitation standards.
- Responds to a food hold and recall in an expedient, effective, and efficient manner.
- Provides a safe environment for performance of work.
- Provides leadership to ensure a secure work environment during an emergency or crisis.

#### EQUIPMENT USE AND CARE

- Establishes administrative responsibility for all foodservice equipment through proper use and care.
- Operates the SNP in compliance with all energy conservation principles.

#### PROCUREMENT

- Conducts the procurement process within the boundaries of federal, state, and local school purchasing guidelines to protect the integrity of the SNP.
- Operates the SNP to ensure that proper receiving procedures and storage techniques are followed.

#### FOOD PRODUCTION

- Applies management principles to establishing and maintaining high standards of control for quality food production and distribution.
- Provides a system for preparing and maintaining records that reflects an accurate report of planned menus, food produced, and food discarded.
- Ensures the SNP creditability through daily monitoring of food production procedures.

#### FOOD ACCEPTABILITY

- Maintains an operation that responds to students’ food preferences.

#### SERVICE

- Develops standards of excellence for providing and maintaining quality in the presentation and service of food.
- Provides leadership to ensure school meals will be served in pleasant facilities and by a courteous staff.

#### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND RECORDKEEPING

- Operates SNP within established guidelines for a financial management system that provides a cost-effective program of high integrity.
- Provides effective office organization and good paper management techniques to ensure all records and supporting documentation are maintained in accordance with federal, state, and local regulations and policies.
- Organizes and manages the business functions of the school foodservice office to maintain an efficient and effective organization.

#### MARKETING

- Implements a marketing plan to create an atmosphere that attracts and pleases students, teachers, administrators, and other school support staff.
- Provides leadership that promotes the SNP and creates an interest in the role of the SNP in the school and community.

(Figure 1 Continued)

- PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
- Manages the SNP staff according to all federal, state, and local district employment laws, policies, and regulations.
  - Communicates effectively with both supervisor and other employees.
  - Creates an atmosphere for employee productivity and satisfaction in the workplace.
  - Implements organizational techniques to accomplish job tasks with efficiency and maximum development of human resources.
  - Integrates a comprehensive training program and standards for evaluating employee performance into the overall management of the SNP.
  - Provides leadership that focuses on reorganizing, understanding, valuing, and effectively managing diversity for maximum productivity.
- PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- Provides leadership that sets high professional standards for the SNP and employees.
  - Establishes professional status for the SNP role in the education community by acquiring the education and skills necessary for leadership and management roles.
- OTHER
- Performs and manages job-related proficiency with the highest ethical integrity.
  - Performs and manages with a commitment to promote a quality SNP that meets the nutritional needs of the customers served.
  - Performs and manages with an overall nature that is committed to the goals and visions of the school district.
  - Performs and manages appropriate communication skills with the customers served.

Table 1 Knowledge and Skill Statements by Functional Area

Functional Area	Original Number of Knowledge and Skill Statements	Modified Statements	Deleted Statements	New Statements	Revised Number of Knowledge and Skill Statements
Nutrition and Menu Planning	74	9	8	5	71
Program Accountability	32	0	0	12	44
*Sanitation, Safety, and Security	46	2	1	33	78
Equipment Use and Care	19	3	0	1	20
Procurement	37	3	3	1	35
Food Production	41	4	0	1	42
Food Acceptability	16	4	0	0	16
Service	27	6	1	3	29
Financial Management and Recordkeeping	42	2	2	2	42
Marketing	34	5	2	0	32
Personnel Management	88	5	2	10	96
Professional Development	23	4	3	1	21
TOTAL	479	47	22	69	526

\* Work group participants recommended changing from Sanitation and Safety.

## PRACTICAL USE OF THIS INFORMATION

Competent school nutrition managers play an important role in overseeing and managing an effective foodservice operation in a local school. Performing at a competent level provides school nutrition managers the ability to effectively contribute to the overall success of the district's SNP.

Although job requirements for a school nutrition manager may differ from state to state and sometimes from school district to school district, the findings from this research study provide needed information for establishing the role an effective school nutrition managers plays. Having an understanding of the job functional areas school nutrition managers are faced with and the supporting competencies, knowledge, and skills that lead to on-the-job success provides a clearer picture of the importance of this position. The findings suggest the role of school nutrition managers is one of early accountability, with 65% of the knowledge and skills needed in an entry level position. Also, the results indicate that the

level of requisite knowledge and skills has elevated at the entry-level more so than ever before. Therefore, entry-level positions for school nutrition managers are faced with more challenges to perform and operate effectively and efficiently.

The revised document serves as a framework for school boards, school nutrition administrators, and other school officials to identify the goals and objectives for hiring or evaluating a school nutrition manager. The information will also assist NFSMI, USDA, state agencies, and other professional groups to design training that is appropriate for managers facing today's job challenges. Additionally, the information will assist in providing a framework of well-defined competencies, knowledge, and skill statements to assist educators in developing curriculum and professional development opportunities for entry-level positions and experienced school nutrition managers.

Table 2 Competencies Statements by Functional Area

Functional Area	Original Number	Revised Number
Nutrition and Menu Planning	5	5
*Program Accountability	2	3
*Sanitation, Safety, and Security	2	4
Equipment Use and Care	2	2
Procurement	2	2
Food Production	3	3
Food Acceptability	1	1
Service	2	2
Financial Management and Recordkeeping	3	3
Marketing	2	2
*Personnel Management	5	6
Professional Development	2	2
Total	31	35

\*Functional Areas with competencies revised/new

## FACT FINDER

- 4 . . Percent of original knowledge and skill statements were deleted
- 6 . . Percent increase in competency statements
- 10 . . Percent increase in overall knowledge and skill statements
- 10 . . Percent of original knowledge and skill statements were modified
- 13 . . Percent of revised knowledge and skill statements are new
- 15 . . Percent increase in revised classification of entry-level knowledge and skill statements
- 21 . . Percent of the new knowledge and skill statements were entry-level
- 38 . . Percent of changes occurred in *Program Accountability*
- 47 . . Percent of the revised knowledge and skill statements fall into three functional areas (*Personnel Management; Nutrition and Menu Planning; and Sanitation, Safety, and Security*)
- 50 . . Percent of original knowledge and skill statements were entry-level
- 65 . . Percent of revised knowledge and skill statements are entry-level
- 70 . . Percent of change occurred in *Sanitation, Safety, and Security*
- 70 . . Percent increase in entry-level statements

Table 3 Performance Level of Knowledge and Skills Statements by Functional Area

Functional Area	Original Number of Statements by Levels		Revised Number of Statements by Levels	
	Entry	Beyond-Entry	Entry	Beyond-Entry
Nutrition and Menu Planning	45	29	36	35
Program Accountability	12	20	34	10
*Sanitation, Safety, and Security	33	13	66	12
Equipment Use and Care	6	13	9	11
Procurement	17	20	33	1
Food Production	23	18	38	4
Food Acceptability	7	9	6	10
Service	14	13	23	6
Financial Management and Recordkeeping	25	17	26	16
Marketing	7	27	11	21
Personnel Management	38	50	55	41
Professional Development	14	9	7	14
Total	241 (50%)	238 (50%)	344 (65%)	182 (35%)

\*Work group participants recommended changing from Sanitation and Safety.

## For More Information

- Cater, J. B., & Carr, D. H. (2004). *Competencies, knowledge, and skills of effective school nutrition managers (R-66-03)*. University, MS: National Food Service Management Institute.
- Conklin, M.T., Sneed, J., & Martin, J. (1995). Preparing child nutrition professionals for the 21st century. *School Food Service Research Review, 19, 1, 6-13*.
- Sneed, J. & White, K. T., (1993). Development and validation of competency statement in school food services. *School Food Service Research Review, 17, 2, 50-61*.



*Please feel free to reproduce and distribute this publication.  
Copies are also available on our Web Site: [www.nfsmi.org](http://www.nfsmi.org)*

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

**NATIONAL FOOD SERVICE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE**

**The University of Mississippi**

Telephone: 800-321-3054

Item Number R-125-04

Deborah H. Carr, PhD, RD and Jerry B. Cater, PhD. Drs. Carr and Cater are Research Scientists at the Applied Research Division of the National Food Service Management Institute, The University of Southern Mississippi.

This publication has been produced by the National Food Service Management Institute-Applied Research Division, located at The University of Southern Mississippi, with headquarters at The University of Mississippi. Funding for the Institute has been provided with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service to The University of Mississippi. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of The University of Mississippi or the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.