



Perceptions and Practices of School Nutrition Professionals Toward Generational and Ethnic Diversity



PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to assess school nutrition (SN) management beliefs and behaviors towards managing a diverse workforce.

METHOD

- A holistic, multi-case study design with literal replication format was applied.
- Pilot visits were conducted at school districts in the Southeast and the Western United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regions.
- Four districts of varying sizes in the Western, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Southeast USDA regions were selected based on recommendations from their state agency and their willingness to participate in the case study project.
- Structured interviews were conducted with SN directors, SN managers, SN supervisors, and SN staff.
- Physical evidence of diversity was collected. Examples included policies and procedures, and printed materials (such as flyers featuring ethnic diversity or multiple languages).

RESULTS

- Results from the study showed similar themes among sites:
- The descriptions of the overall climate of diversity among sites and all SN management and staff included respectful, friendly, cooperative, supportive, and welcoming environments for all staff.
 - The advantages of managing a diverse staff included wisdom and knowledge gained from working with older staff, and team work.
 - The disadvantages of diverse staff included the need to provide additional training and supervisory oversight for younger employees, and the need to mediate language barriers among ethnically diverse staff.
 - The SN management staff reported experiencing issues or biases on SN jobs based on generational or ethnic differences, while SN staff did not report any issues or biases.

CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATIONS

While managing, leading, and training a diverse staff may offer advantages and disadvantages, this study did identify best practices for managing and training a diverse work force. The best practice recommendations gained from SN administration and staff participating in this study included being an active listener, becoming familiar with the staff and staff needs, and being patient with your SN workforce. As it relates to training a diverse SN workforce, best practices included offering multilingual training materials and utilizing multilingual staff during trainings. The data from this study can be used to assist in developing training and resources for SN professionals interested in creating a positive diversity climate within the local SN program.

Advice from SN Directors for Managing a Diverse SN Workforce

- Educate yourself about different cultures.
- Be fair to all staff, regardless of age or ethnicity.
- Treat all staff the same.
- Develop good communication skills.
- Be a good listener.
- Find and use good resources.
- Know your staff.
- Be patient.

Advice from SN Directors for Training a Diverse SN Workforce

- Provide multilingual training materials.
- Utilize multilingual staff during the training process.
- Customize trainings to meet the needs of the staff.
- Be patient.

For more information, you can download the original report at <http://nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=592>

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This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service through an agreement with Institute of Child Nutrition at The University of Mississippi. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

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