Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills Needed by School Nutrition Managers in the 21st Century

2017

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1-800-321-3054
Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills Needed by School Nutrition Managers in the 21st Century

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2017
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VISION
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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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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Applied Research Division (ARD) of the Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) initiated a multiphase research project to revise the *Competencies, Knowledge and Skill Statements of Effective School Nutrition Managers* publication used to assist school districts in developing professional standards to improve job performance of school nutrition (SN) managers. Initial research activities spanned a period of approximately four years, culminating in 1995. The second update consisted of a three-phase research project. In the first phase, researchers conducted a national survey of selected SN professionals to determine the relevance of existing knowledge and skill statements, and to evaluate existing experience level (entry-or beyond-entry level) categories for knowledge and skill statements. In the second phase, survey respondents participated in regional work groups to reach consensus on the appropriate update for each statement, and to conduct gap analysis identified in the original document. In the third phase, the revised statements were validated by mail. The updated version of *Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills of Effective School Nutrition Managers* published in 2004, served as the foundation for the first phase of this current research project. For purposes of the previous documents and this research, a school manager is defined as a manager who works in a single school, and reports to a district director.

The purpose of the current research is to identify and update the functional areas that encompass the responsibilities of SN managers, and to develop a draft of research-based knowledge and skill statements related to the revised set of functional areas. An expert panel of
20 SN professionals identified eight functional areas using a modified Delphi technique. Six Delphi rounds were conducted by e-mail, with the questionnaire and summary of the previous round sent as attachments to the expert panel. Panel members completed and returned the questionnaire in each round. Round 1 consisted of open-ended questions asking expert panel members to list functional areas they thought summarized responsibilities of SN managers. In subsequent rounds, the panel members were instructed to review a summary from previous rounds, and to rate their agreement with the groupings or topics listed as a major functional area. Consensus for eight functional areas was reached after six rounds.

A draft of updated knowledge and skill statements, as they apply to today’s work environment in SN programs, were identified using focus groups, SN program site visits, and research of related printed material, including *Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills of Effective School Nutrition Managers* (2004). School sites and focus group sites were selected to give representation to United States Department of Agriculture regions, as well as small, urban and large city schools. Researchers used an observation tool and interview questions to analyze day-to-day activities of a typical SN manager. The observations and interview responses were summarized to describe roles and responsibilities of SN site managers. Focus groups were used to determine the perceptions, feelings, and thought processes of group members about issues, products, and services impacting child nutrition programs. Questions were open-ended, and were designed to get specific information about the knowledge and skills needed by effective SN managers. Transcripts of the focus groups were coded by groups, cut apart by comment, and arranged by functional area content. Focus groups ranged from eight to fourteen participants.

Summarizations from the site visits, focus groups, the *Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills of Effective School Nutrition Managers* resource, printed publications, and Internet sources
were used to draft 191 knowledge statements and 384 skill statements. This project lays the groundwork for further research to determine the competencies related to each functional area, and the knowledge and skill statements that detail the duties of an SN manager.