

Student Q&A with School Nutrition Directors

In fall 2011, SNS DPG held a Webinar for nutrition students across the nation interested in working in the practice area of School Nutrition Services. Below you will find questions from the webinar event, answered by the expert panel of speakers.

Expert Panel

Linda B. Godfrey, MS, RD, LD, SNS – Former School Nutrition Director, Shelby County Schools, Alabama; School Nutrition Consultant

Carol Longley, PhD, RD – Former School Nutrition Director, Rockford Public Schools, Assistant Professor at Western Illinois University

Connie Mueller, MS, RD, SNS – Former School Nutrition Director, Bloomington, IL; School Nutrition Consultant

1. What is a typical day like as a school nutrition director?

- Every day is different - one thing that makes the job so great
- Need to be flexible – things come up last minute
- A few daily duties: develop specifications for new equipment, update the policy and procedure manual, develop a power point presentation for the Board of Education meeting, participate in a School Nutrition webinar, participate in a SNS/Academy conference call, complete personnel evaluations, etc.
- Work is not defined day by day, but by an entire year. Usually you are working for 6 months into the future instead of the actual day.

2. Which of the topics/skills learned in dietetics education are most important in school nutrition?

In School Nutrition you use everything you learn:

- Special topic areas: nutrition for special needs children, time and personnel management, interviewing techniques, developing effective presentations
- Quantity/food prep skills: kitchen layout and design, ServSafe, HACCP, menu preparation
- Specific Skills: writing food and equipment specifications, marketing, Excel, website design, budgeting
- HR skills: ability to listen and communicate clearly, work in groups, write clearly and at an appropriate level

The National Food Service Management has published research describing the skills and competencies required to be successful as a school nutrition director:

<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20090514085653.pdf>

3. What would be an appropriate entry-level job in school nutrition for an RD?

- Area/Regional Supervisor (large school system)
- School District Dietitian (typically involved in menu planning and addressing special nutrition needs of students)
- School Nutrition Director (small district-5000 students or less)
- Assistant Director
- Nutrition Education Manager

4. Do you have suggestions for networking in school nutrition?

- Become involved with the local or state dietetic association.
- Volunteer with a school system (*see question 5*).
- Check out www.snsdpg.org for our member list and organize the spreadsheet to show the members in your state.
- You could contact an SNS DPG member and offer to help with a National Nutrition Month promotion or ask to come in to job shadow for a day.
- Attend local, state and national meetings.
- In truth the school nutrition professionals are some of the nicest, most sharing group of professionals you will meet. If you call a couple of local school foodservice directors, and introduce yourself, they will help you get started.

5. What volunteer experiences should one seek if interested in school nutrition?

- Summer Feeding Programs
- After School Snack Programs
- Food banks
- Health fairs

Contact the school nutrition department in your local school district for more ideas

6. Are there internships specific to school nutrition?

Yes, these internships offer concentrated experience in school nutrition programs. More information about each of these internships can be found in the internship directory on the Academy's website: <http://www.eatright.org/BecomeanRDorDTR/content.aspx?id=8156>

- Alabama State Department of Education, Montgomery, AL
- Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Tallahassee, FL
- Sarasota District Schools, Osprey, FL
- Morrison Chartwells, Distance Education Dietetic Internship, Atlanta, GA
- Utah State University-Salt Lake City, UT

Other internships may include school nutrition rotations or may have flexible options. You may wish to contact the director of internships that you are interested in to find out whether school nutrition experiences are included.

7. What background is needed to start a career in school nutrition? Could a diet tech become a director?

- Yes, several very successful directors are DTR's.
- Experience in purchasing and employee management is very important.
- An RD with an interest in food service management and a master's degree is preferable.
- States vary as to the requirements for SN directors.