

# Statewide Training Needs Assessment Project

**THE JOHN C. STALKER INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND NUTRITION  
AT FRAMINGHAM STATE UNIVERSITY**

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# Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

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The John C. Stalker Institute of Food and Nutrition (JSI), in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), Office for Nutrition, Health and Safety Programs, conducted a statewide training needs assessment project. The purpose was to gather information from Massachusetts school nutrition professionals about their needs and wants for training and professional development to assist with program operations and management.

Conducted in five phases over a one year period, the project spanned two annual Advisory Board meetings. Phase I began with Advisory Board members creating a list of training topics and methods for directors, managers, and nutrition assistants. Topics were categorized according to the School Nutrition Association's Keys to Excellence: Administration; Operations; Nutrition, Nutrition Education and Physical Activity; and Marketing and Communications. Focus groups of school nutrition directors and managers reduced the list of training topics to a more manageable level identifying those with the highest priority.

In Phase II two survey questionnaires (director, manager/nutrition assistants) were created and pilot tested. Questions focused on such things as the importance of specific training skills vs. personal competence, effectiveness of training methods, timing, barriers to training, and demographics. The surveys were distributed statewide in Phase III with data analysis in Phase IV. Finally, the second annual Advisory Board meeting completed Phase V where training needs were prioritized according to data interpretation and the new professional standards. JSI and ESE will use this information in program planning over the next several years.

Highlights of the results include:

**Skill Performance:** strengths fall into the areas of nutrition, food allergies, implementation of new menu planning standards, culinary techniques, and technology (especially for directors).

**Food Safety:** The number of school nutrition personnel who have completed ServSafe (or other similar certification) is exemplary; directors and managers reported a high level of competence in most of the food safety skills.

**Financial Management:** Respondents identified this area as the greatest training need for both directors and managers.

**Purchasing Laws/30B legislation:** Both the survey and the Advisory Board identified this topic as a strong training need for directors.

**Technology:** Technology skills such as Microsoft Office systems, social media, and working with local IT support services were identified as a training need by directors for their staff and by the managers and nutrition assistants.

**Nutrition and Nutrition Education:** Weakness in competency for this area fell primarily in promoting the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) from a nutrition perspective and nutrition promotion to students and parents. Managers and nutrition assistants also identified a training gap in gluten free diets.

**Marketing and Communications:** Directors identified marketing, collaboration, connecting and championing the NSLP to parents and students as a high training need. Marketing skills, signage and appealing presentation of food was identified for managers and nutrition assistants.

**Barriers to Training:** Directors indicated time and money as the major barriers for training for both themselves as well as for their staff. Having the knowledge to provide training but not the time to prepare class resources to staff was also designated.

**Bundling of Courses:** Bundling several workshops together to meet the mandated annual hours for continuing education/training for professional standards could be advantageous. Examples include production records, cost control techniques and food safety; several workshops on personnel management; or financial management with sustainability. Investigating how the bundling could tie in with the School Nutrition Association's levels of certification and credentialing would also promote the achievement of continuing education.

**Effectiveness of Training:** The most effective method of training were workshops followed closely by classroom; webinars and self-paced computer-based training were also rated as highly effective.

**Timing of Training:** Directors tended to favor afternoons or possibly vacations whereas managers and nutrition assistants favored afternoons and evenings. Managers/nutrition assistants were also positive about training during vacation times but this could be limited by budgetary resources.

The results of this project indicate that although Massachusetts has challenges to meet regarding training, there is a strong base as evidenced by higher education, food safety certification and experience in school nutrition programs. JSI clearly has been a catalyst to develop the skill base and will continue to do so. The Statewide Needs Assessment Project provides constructive steps upon which JSI, ESE, and its partners can meet and exceed national professional standards and continuing education/training.