

TDA Staffing Guidelines

A district must determine the basic plan of the food services organization to ensure the right positions are developed to support the organization and the size since personnel are instrumental to the success of the operation.

The two basic ways of administering a school nutrition program are centralized and decentralized. Most school districts have centralized their nutrition service management. Centralized management means different things to different school districts. In some districts, it means little more than doing the accounting work and the monthly state claims at one location. In other districts, it means centralized menu planning, purchasing, warehousing, accounting, fiscal control and hiring personnel. In some areas, the trend is toward merging two or more small school districts under one director to reduce administrative costs and obtaining a qualified director to share in the skills of handling the stricter and more complex federal guidelines.

When the school district has a decentralized food service operation, each school controls its own food service. This control may involve menu planning, purchasing, implementing federal and state regulations, financial and personnel management, and preparing state reports.

Centralized administration, with the responsibility for all the various jobs related to the school nutrition service operations, has the following advantages:

- The district can afford a more-qualified person in the leadership role.
- More purchasing power is possible.
- Principals spend less time on food and nutrition service matters.
- More consistency in service exists among schools.

In a small school district, a director and one or two persons may make up the staff. The staff become knowledgeable about the school food and nutrition service programs.

In larger districts, the span of control recommended is one supervisor for five to seven employees. This ratio results in layers of management. The trend today is toward a broader span of control and holding each employee responsible for the total job he or she has done.

The span of control will depend on what the director/supervisor/manager handles and the training and skill level of the people supervised. The following questions will help in making that decision.

- How many schools can one person supervise?
- When does a director need another supervisor?
- When does a supervisor need an assistant?
- How many employees can one person manage?
- What other responsibilities will the person have?

Table 1 provides a suggested guideline for staffing at the administrative/supervisory level. The positions are the equivalent of a director assistant director and supervisor, but the titles may differ from school district to school district.

Table 1 – Administrative Staffing Guide for District

Number of Schools ¹	Director	Assistant Director	Supervisory Staff
Up to 10	1		
11 to 20	1		1
21+	1	1	1 for every 20 schools

Source: Martin, J. & Oakley, C. (2008). *Managing child nutrition programs: Leadership for excellence*. Sudbury, MA.

¹Schools in this chart are those with on-site preparation.

In addition to supervising the schools, the director/assistant director/supervisory and office staff are assigned numerous other responsibilities. For example, the director and staff are responsible for the following:

- Menu planning, special diets
- Purchasing, handling of bid process and orders
- Technology
- Marketing

Staffing school food services in the past may have been based on “we need more help.” Table 2 is widely used guidelines to apply for staffing on-site production in schools.

Table 2 – Staffing Guidelines for On-site Production

Number of Meal Equivalents ²	Meals Per Labor Hour (MPLH) for Low and High Productivity			
	Conventional System ³ MPLH		Convenience System ⁴ MPLH	
	Low	High	Low	High
Up to 100	8	10	10	12
101 to 150	9	11	11	13
151 to 200	10 to 11	12	12	14
201 to 250	12	14	14	15
251 to 300	13	15	15	16
301 to 400	14	16	16	18
401 to 500	14	17	18	19
501 to 600	15	17	18	19
601 to 700	16	18	19	20
701 to 800	17	19	20	22
801 and up	18	20	21	23

²Meal equivalents include breakfast and a la carte sales.

³Conventional system is preparation of some foods from raw ingredients on premises (using some bakery breads and prepared pizza and washing dishes).

⁴Convenience system is using maximum amount of processed foods (e.g., using all bakery breads, pre-cooked chicken, ready to serve raw fruits and vegetables, portioned condiments and washing only trays and using disposable dinnerware).

Using the staffing guidelines in Table 2 include the following steps:

1. Determine the average meal equivalents.
2. Determine whether a conventional or convenience system of food preparation is used.
3. Select the recommended productivity rate.
4. Divide total meal equivalents by productivity rate.