How Food Services Education Support Professionals Make Public Schools Great for Every Student

ESPs who work in food services help make great public schools by ensuring that students have access to safe and nutritious meals. Food service professionals provide a basic component of student success—nutrition—which influences students’ behavior, energy levels, thinking, physical health, and overall well-being. Food service professionals know that students who are undernourished are less able to learn.

Some of the more important aspects of food service jobs include proper food handling, adapting recipes for children with special dietary needs, and nutrition education and practice. The meals that food service professionals provide meet recommended dietary guidelines and help students develop lifelong healthy eating habits.
WE NOURISH STUDENTS. WE HELP CHILDREN GROW AND STAY HEALTHY. WE KEEP PREP AND SERVING AREAS SAFE AND CLEAN.

**NEA’s Food Services Members Are:**

**Well-trained.** Sixty percent of us meet specific job requirements. Twenty-nine percent have special certificates, 37 percent have taken special classes or exams, and 29 percent must pass examinations or coursework on a regular basis.

**Committed.** On average, food services ESPs have been working in our field for 11 years. Ninety percent of us plan to stay in the ESP field, and 74 percent plan to stay in our current jobs until retirement.

**Active in the school community.** Eighty-four percent of us live in the school district in which we work. Thirty-two percent have volunteered time to support a parent education association. Twenty-four percent have volunteered or supported a sports program. Twenty-one percent have volunteered to read books to students. Fifty-four percent have spent our own money to purchase food or school supplies for children.

**Focused on safety.** Thirty-four percent of us have intervened to stop bullying behavior in school, and 20 percent have intervened to stop school violence such as harassing, intimidating, or threatening others.

**Fast Facts about NEA’s Food Services ESP Members**

- 64% of us work full-time.
- 52% work in school buildings, and 43% work in central food facilities.
- 98% are female.
- 81% are married.
- Our average age is 52.
- On average, we have belonged to NEA for 9 years.

**Workplace Conditions and Issues**

Food services ESPs would like to see more well-defined job descriptions and greater awareness and appreciation of our work. Twenty-one percent of us do not have a job description at all. Sixty-three percent have no input on updating or changing our job descriptions. Thirty-eight percent of us are asked to perform duties outside of our job descriptions.

We are concerned about the contracting out of food services operations to private, for-profit vendors. Twenty-four percent of NEA ESP members report that food service work is being contracted out in their districts.

We are also concerned about safety. Food preparation involves the ever-present risk of burns, cuts, falls, and similar mishaps. We would like health and safety training and information.

Food service ESPs want more access to training and professional development opportunities so we can improve our chances for advancement. We would like better wages and job benefits, such as health insurance and pensions.