

Questions and Answers about the new school Food Service Professional Standards

May 1, 2015

On March 2, 2015 the US Department of Agriculture issued regulations that create annual training requirements for all school nutrition staff. These regulations are part of the “Professional Standards Rule” under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA). Here are answers to some common questions about the new regulations.

Q. When do the new training rules go into effect?

A. The new regulations take effect July 1, 2015. This means they will be in place for the 2015-16 school year.

Q. Who is covered by the new rules?

A. The training requirements apply to all employees who are involved in the day-to-day food service operations of schools that participate in the national school lunch or breakfast program (this is nearly all public schools). This includes 2 groups of food service ESPs:

1. School nutrition program managers – “those individuals directly responsible for the management of the day-to-day operations of school food service for a participating school(s).”
2. School nutrition program staff – “those individuals, without managerial responsibilities, involved in day-to-day operations of school food service for a participating school(s).”

Q. How much training is required?

A. School nutrition program managers must receive 10 hours of training per year, and school nutrition program staff must receive 6 hours of training per year. For staff who work less than 20 hours per week these requirements are reduced to 4 hours per year.

The training hour requirement is being phased in for the period July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016. In this first year 6 hours of training are required for managers and 4 hours for staff.

Q. Do the rules create education requirements for being hired as a food service ESP?

A. No, there are no education prerequisites for school nutrition program managers or school nutrition program staff – just the annual training requirements. You do not need any particular course work or credentials to be hired as a nutrition manager or staff. There are new rules about education prerequisites for school district nutrition directors.

Q. What are the training subjects?

A. The USDA only lays out general areas of training, such as identification of reimbursable meals at the point of service, nutrition, health and safety standards, etc. USDA does not require specific training sessions. The training must be relevant to a person's job. For instance, application, certification, and verification procedures might be relevant for someone in a clerical position in the nutrition program, while knife skills are not.

Q. Does the school district have to pay food service ESPs for the time they spend in training sessions?

A. If a school nutrition program manager or school nutrition program staff member must participate in the training to keep their job, then the federal Fair Labor Standards Act requires that time spent in training be paid work time. This is true whether training occurs during or outside of the regular work schedule, on-site or off-site, and whether it is provided by the school district or by someone else, so long as the employee must participate in order to retain their job.

Q. Does the training have to occur during the regular work day?

A. The USDA hopes that training will be scheduled during regular work day, but there is no requirement for this in the regulations.

Q. Who pays for the training?

A. NEA believes that school districts should pay for the cost of all required training, whether it is provided on-site or outside of the district. However, the regulations do not require this.

Q. What can I do to get quality training for myself and my co-workers?

The new rules are an opportunity to get high-quality professional development. This can improve members' professional skills, improve school nutrition programs and student health, and give Food Service ESPs recognition as essential partners in ensuring student success. Here are some ideas about what Food Service ESPs and their Associations can do:

- Form a joint labor-management professional development committee to plan and deliver trainings that will help our members.
- Make sure that Food Service ESPs can keep their own portfolios of the training they have received. School districts are already required to maintain these records under the new rules.
- Work with the school district to provide certificates to ESPs who have attained different levels of training.
- Identify key trainings which will be in high demand, and train a group of food service ESPs so that they can deliver these trainings to their co-workers.

Q. Who should I contact if I have questions or a problem with the new regulations?

A. Contact your Association leaders and your UniServ Director. NEA ESP Quality will help them with information and advice.