

► Putting the Spotlight on Food Service

It's only been in recent years that experts have emphasized how important good nutrition is to student learning and achievement. When it comes to providing this basic element for student success, the focus shifts to food service employees.

Studies have shown that students who come to school undernourished are often uninterested in learning and unable to concentrate—factors that affect a child's ability to learn. Hungry children also miss more school—another factor that impacts student success.

Food service employees are no longer just the nice cafeteria ladies who wear hairnets and dish up food. They are skilled professionals in the areas of diet, nutrition and food safety.

To help erase the image of these employees as “just the cooks,” we need to know more about the jobs they perform. The following data and information come from the “2012 NEA K-12 ESP Membership Survey Report.”

- NEA considers the following classifications to fall under the food service category: cooks and food preparation workers, cashiers and dietitians, and technicians.
- On average, these ESP members have 10 years of experience with their current employer—a testament to their employment stability.
- Food service employees make up 10 percent of NEA ESP membership. That translates to more than 29,000 people.
- More than 60 percent of food service employees work full time.
- More than 67 percent of food service employees have attended professional development training in the past two years.
- Lately there has been a greater appreciation of the training needs for food service employees. Training that was once just available to supervisors and managers is being offered on topics such as:

- Food handling
- Proper use of chemicals
- Safety and sanitation
- Recipe adaptation
- Kitchen math
- Preparation and merchandising
- Nutrition education
- Equipment