

**Portfolio**  
**K-State Excellence in Engagement Award**  
***Advancing Child Nutrition Programs in Kansas***

**Submitted by:**  
**College of Human Ecology, Hospitality Management and Dietetics**  
**Kansas Department of Education, Child Nutrition and Wellness**

## **Kansas State University Excellence in Engagement Award Advancing Child Nutrition Programs in Kansas**

### **Abstract**

The partnership between the Department of Hospitality Management and Dietetics and the Kansas Department of Education's Child Nutrition and Wellness division makes an impact state-wide through collaborative research, teaching, and outreach. Both entities prioritize improving child nutrition programs throughout Kansas. The relationship utilizes distinct skill sets that, when combined, benefit children, K-State students and faculty, and current child nutrition professionals. This unique engagement is characterized by effective and reciprocal scholarship through integrated research, teaching, and outreach activities that impact more than 350,000 Kansas children who participate in more than 1,600 Kansas school nutrition programs and the many hard working professionals who serve them.

### **The Partnership**

#### **Kansas State University, Department of Hospitality Management and Dietetics**

##### **Principle Contact: Kevin Sauer, PhD, RD, LD**

The Department of Hospitality Management and Dietetics (HMD) prepares graduates to be leaders in the dietetics and hospitality fields by integrating theory, experience, and research. HMD is committed to disseminating expertise and knowledge to the people of Kansas and beyond. The department is an established leader in dietetics and distance education, with a national reputation for providing outstanding operations management training for Registered Dietitians (RDs). Further, the HMD graduate programs reside among the top in the country, with an established research portfolio. The U.S. Department of Agriculture funded the Center of Excellence in Food Safety Research in Child Nutrition Programs established in HMD, which recognizes the department's ability to contribute significantly at a national level.

#### **Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Division of Child Nutrition & Wellness**

##### **Principle Contact: Cheryl Johnson, MS, RD, LD**

The Kansas Child Nutrition & Wellness (CNW) program provides leadership, training, technical assistance, and supervisory oversight for local school food authorities with the goal of enhancing quality child nutrition and wellness programs for Kansas children. CNW's oversight includes the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, After School Care Snack Program, Special Milk Program, Summer Food Service Program, Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Team Nutrition, and Kansas Coordinated School Health. CNW also serves as the liaison between the Food and Nutrition Service of the USDA and state-wide child nutrition program sponsors. Through this partnership of federal, state, and local sponsors, numerous program services and benefits are delivered to schools, child care facilities, and other organizations.

### **Lessons Learned and Best Practices**

The HMD/CNW partnership has always existed, but evolved substantially since 2005 and exemplifies best practices through collaborative training and teaching, engagement among faculty, students, and nutrition professionals, and teamwork on research. Because the partnership is such a natural fit, few challenges have been encountered. The main lesson learned is that great things can be achieved when community partners share a common goal and vision and are willing to work cooperatively and creatively to further that vision. This partnership has truly been a win-win for both entities and their constituents.

**Best Practice: Collaborative training and teaching**

Training and teaching expertise is reciprocal, directly impacting the community and students. CNW provides instruction and training to child nutrition professionals throughout Kansas. One highlight includes the annual Child Nutrition Management Academy provided for school foodservice management personnel at regional sites each summer. Dr. Sauer has served as a cadre trainer for the Child Nutrition Academy since 2005. The training topics are diverse, including nutrition education, workplace communication, human resource management, food safety and allergies, marketing, finance, and quantity food production. To date, Sauer has taught over 100 classes engaging numerous child nutrition personnel across the state. In 2012, Missy Schrader, HMD Instructor and PhD student, developed and debuted a series of “Culinary Champion” courses for child nutrition professionals. The Culinary Champion series now compliments the annual summer Child Nutrition Management Academy. Indeed, shared teaching expertise directly impacts the school nutrition community.

**Best practice: Engagement between K-State students and industry**

*Jump Start* is a two-day orientation class taught by CNW consultants originally intended to provide in-depth administrative training for newly hired school foodservice directors in Kansas. In 2009, CNW trainers were invited to provide the same *Jump Start* training for senior dietetics students with the goal of enhancing the existing curriculum and training specific to child nutrition programs. This was a success.

In 2010, this program was enhanced when HMD and CNW combined senior students with newly hired school foodservice directors across Kansas for *Jump Start*. Now offered twice a year on the K-State campus, this unique opportunity continues to engage graduating dietetics students with current operators in the field and state agency personnel. New school foodservice directors find pride and excitement in coming to the K-State campus, and in sharing their experiences with students. Graduating seniors expand their professional network and administrative knowledge base about operating child nutrition programs. Students also leave *Jump Start Certified*. This innovative approach of combining new child nutrition professionals and graduating dietetics students does not exist anywhere else in the country and now serves as a model form of collaboration between a state university and state child nutrition agency.

**Best Practice: Meeting industry needs**

A current reality in the child nutrition environment across the nation is the significant number of current and anticipated retirements among managers of child nutrition programs, a professional role very well aligned with K-State dietetics graduates who have attained a strong educational background in managing food and nutrition programs. CNW and HMD believe that the needs of children and child nutrition programs in Kansas are best served by K-State graduates.

HMD is a nationally recognized leader in dietetics education, and specifically, in developing successful Registered Dietitians who administer food and nutrition service programs in medical centers, long-term care facilities, college dining, and K-12 child nutrition programs. Compared to other programs in the county, K-State RDs are uniquely prepared and known for integrating sound nutrition, financial and menu planning, service, and food safety – all benchmarks for successful child nutrition programs.

The partnership has successfully met the goal of placing K-State graduates/RDs in child nutrition programs. Specifically, the CNW is often the first to become aware of vacant management positions in school foodservice operations. The close working relationship with CNW initiates quick dialog about these positions with HMD faculty and graduating seniors. Because of *Jump Start*, these same

graduates are competitively trained in child nutrition programs and have direct contact with CNW consultants. As a result, eight K-State RDs have been hired as school foodservice directors in Kansas since 2009. Also, since 2009, CNW has hired five new K-State RDs in grant writing and coordinator roles at the State office. Combined, these K-State RDs now continue to nurture the established HMD/CNW partnership providing expertise and access to facilities for research projects and practice sites for K-State student interns.

#### **Best practice: Collaborative research**

Research is supported by the partnership. In 2011, K-State HMD was selected by the USDA (the funding agency for child nutrition programs) to establish the Center of Excellence for Food Safety Research in Child Nutrition Programs. The Center specifically conducts research on important topics such as produce safety and evaluation of school food safety programs with oversight from USDA's Food and Nutrition Services. Cheryl Johnson, CNW Team Leader, serves on the Center's advisory board. Cheryl and her staff have played an active role in the Center, providing recommendations and direction for food safety studies. CNW has assisted with recruiting study participants and providing guidance for other funded research projects including an assessment of current practices and perceptions about food allergy training in schools and the evaluation of produce food safety risks in schools foodservice operations. The expertise of HMD researchers is shared with CNW personnel for grant applications and related projects.

#### **Impacts**

**The impact of this partnership is significant. More than 350,000 Kansas children participate in the National School Lunch Program daily in more than 1,600 schools. The partnership between HMD and CNW yields stronger training and programming for child nutrition administrators and other program personnel state wide. In turn, this directly improves the quality and safety of food and nutrition services provided to children participating in all state-sponsored food programs. Furthermore, K-State dietetics students gain from being provided with current and valuable insight from face-to-face interaction with Kansas child nutrition managers and state agency consultants. These students graduate more prepared, with an expanded professional network, and a marketable skill set specific for navigating the child nutrition environment. State agency staff and K-State faculty gain through shared expertise and new discoveries about child nutrition protocol, school foodservice standards, food safety, and other research areas. This special collaboration provides a rare opportunity for K-State faculty to engage directly with those working in the child nutrition field. This partnership has enriched the classroom for students, yielded field experiences for students, provided undergraduate research experiences, enhanced the quality of employee training, and strengthened research grants and current projects.**

#### **Looking Forward**

The collaboration will continue to develop. New initiatives will capitalize on the CNW/HMD partnership in 2013 and beyond, further uniting students, research, teaching, and outreach. Both CNW and HMD will engage undergraduate HMD students in new research, which is consistent with the K-State 2025 vision. During 2013, dietetics students will collect data for a funded fruit and vegetable intervention study being conducted by CNW at Kansas middle schools. In addition, an Honor's Student assigned to Dr. Sauer will assess the CNW Body Venture program. Scholarly publications and communication will result from this work. If awarded, the partners will together identify meaningful ways to invest in the funds directly towards additional programming and more positive outcomes. Clearly, Kansas child nutrition programs, Kansas State University, and Kansas school children will continue to prosper as a result of this partnership.

