Date of Interview:  June 21, 1999

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BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

1. How many School Food Authorities (SFAs) are there in your state?

There are 1,496 SFAs. About 400 are residential child care institutions (RCCIs).

2. How do you define an SFA? Is it a school district or something else?

SFAs are usually school districts. Private schools and RCCIs are usually their own SFAs.

3. When did your state begin SMI reviews?


4. How many SMI reviews were completed in

   1996–1997? A few reviews were conducted, but some of the agencies still had waivers to omit reviews. Most of the time was spent on training and on-site technical assistance.
   1998–1999? 99 reviews (however, when they are all in, this will probably be closer to 200).

5. How do you define a completed review?

Right now, a completed review is one that has been closed out. However, if the SFA could not get all the necessary information, no nutrient analysis information will be available. This is most common with RCCIs. The SFA has to show that it is moving towards completion of nutrient analysis.

6. When do you expect to complete the first round of School Meals Initiative (SMI) reviews?

7. Do you think your state will need to make any changes in the future to process or staffing in order to complete the SMI reviews in five years?

The Field Services Unit will be adding two full-time child nutrition positions this year and probably one more next year. The Nutrition Standards Unit will add two child nutrition assistants to perform nutrient analysis.

8. Are SMI reviews done in conjunction with Coordinated Review Effort (CRE) reviews?

Yes, they are done in conjunction with CRE reviews.

9. If you do SMI reviews in conjunction with the CRE, did you have to add staff to do this? What kind of training was involved?

The same staff that was doing CRE reviews is now doing SMI reviews as well. One child nutrition consultant has been added since the SMI reviews began. The staff responsible for summer programs has been doing the reviews of the Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCIs).

10. Do your reviewers have access to e-mail?

Yes. However, there have been some problems with e-mail for people who are not based in the Sacramento office. The problems should be fixed in the next few months.

11. Do your reviewers have access to the Internet?

Some do. Currently, some of the reviewers have Internet access. When the e-mail system is fixed, all reviewers will have Internet access.

12. Is there any other software (e.g., MS Excel) that reviewers use for completing reviews? If so, what? Is the same software used at the state level and at the SFA level?

Yes. All reviewers and staff in the state office have Word, Excel, and Nutrikids. However, staff at the state agency are currently evaluating the Nutrikids software and all the other approved packages to see what is best for them. There has been a big problem with Nutrikids at the state level because the program was designed for one school. The state agency needs to keep all open nutrient analyses on it, and
that has not been possible. The state has fixed the problem temporarily, but possibly not completely.

13. How many people are involved in doing SMI reviews and analysis?

There are 25 people: 23 reviewers (22 of whom have nutritional backgrounds) and two data-entry staff.

14. Where are they located? For whom do they work?

Four of the reviewers and the data entry staff are in the office in Sacramento. The rest are located throughout the state. They all work for the Department of Education.

15. What are each of their roles in the SMI reviews?

The reviewers are responsible for going to the SFA and collecting the necessary information. They also work with the SFA to develop an improvement plan. Even if the SFA meets all nutrient standards, there is usually some improvement plan. In cases where the SFA runs its own nutrient analysis, the state agency verifies that it was done correctly. The reviewers also do some nutrient analyses themselves. The data entry people enter the information from the reviewers into Nutrikids and run the analyses. They also contact the reviewer and the SFA if there is essential information missing.

16. Does the state agency have access to the nutrient analysis information?

Yes.

17. Do you feel that the SMI reviews are necessary to bring school meals into compliance with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Recommended Daily Allowances?

Yes. Nutrient analyses are helpful but alternate analyses may be more appropriate in some instances. The RCCIs should be allowed to use an enhanced meal pattern instead of full nutrient analysis. They have very high staff turnover, and they are in a home setting, so meal planning is only a small part of their responsibilities. The state has been working on developing a tool that the RCCIs could use as an alternative. It would be very user-friendly and be based on the food
guide pyramid. If the RCCIs followed it, they would know how much of each nutrient the children were getting.

18. Do you think it would be difficult for the reviewers in this state to provide information to the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) directly?

Yes. Most of the reviewers do not have the capability to send the information directly. Also, most of the nutrient analyses are done by staff in the state office and not by the reviewers themselves.

PROCESS IN THE STATE

1. Who collects the raw information for nutrient analyses on food offered in any given SFA?

The reviewers.

2. With what organization is this person employed?

The State Department of Education.

3. In what format is the information collected? Does this format change over the course of the review? For example, if the initial information is collected on hard copy, is it ever converted to an electronic version?

The information is collected in hard copy and then entered into Nutrikids for the nutrient analysis. A hard copy of the analysis is printed and saved in the SFA’s file, and the information from the analysis is saved on computer. The state agency has just started an Access database in which to keep the information.

4. Who performs the nutrient analysis of this information?

Some reviewers complete the nutrient analyses themselves. Most analyses are done by the two data entry staff in the Nutrition Standards Unit at the state office. In addition, some SFAs do their own analyses. In these cases, the reviewer makes sure that they are done correctly before they are sent to the state.

5. Are there any steps between the initial collection of information and the nutrient analysis? If so, what are they and who performs them?
The information is collected by the reviewers and sent to the Nutrition Standards Unit. If there are missing items or questions, the data entry staff may go back to the reviewers or the SFA for more information.

6. Is the nutrient analysis ever revised after it is initially performed? If so, when and by whom? Where is the revision information recorded?

The Nutrition Standards Unit does not revise analyses done at the state agency. If an analysis is done by a reviewer, the Nutrition Standards Unit may make minor changes and request a revision. In these cases, the analysis is sent back to the reviewer. The reviewer then follows up with the SFA and provides suggestions for improvement. The SFA has to report back on what it is doing to improve. The improvement plan is decided on by the reviewer and the SFA together.

7. How often are nutrient analyses usually revised?

They are usually not revised.

8. Are data elements ever added or deleted from the information during this process?

No. Clarification of the information may be obtained by the reviewer if the agency has questions, but items are not added or deleted.

9. Is the information aggregated in some way other than at the state level? For example, at a district or regional level? If so, at what level?

No, it is only aggregated at the state level.

10. Where are SFA-level records kept and in what format?

If the SFA or the reviewer does the analysis, then the backup detail is not passed on to the state. Only the analysis itself is sent to the state. When the state does the analysis, then all the backup detail is kept on file as well. In either case, the analysis itself is kept at the state agency in both hard copy and electronic format.

11. When is the information sent to the state and by whom?
The reviewer sends the information directly to the state after the review at the SFA is completed.

12. How is the information sent to the state? Electronically? Hard copy? If electronically, please describe the protocols used. For example, is the information recorded on a diskette? Sent by e-mail? Other?

Currently, everything is sent to the state in hard copy. It would be ideal if information could be sent in electronic format. However, that is probably not something that will happen in the immediate future.

13. Where is the information kept and in what format? If applicable, please give a name and telephone number for the person who would have this information at the state level.

Nutrikids analyses: Kathy Mackey.
Access database: Jean Naylor.

14. Does the state do an independent nutrient analysis for SMI reviews, or does the state review existing analyses, or both? In which cases does the state do independent reviews? In which cases does the state review nutrient analyses performed elsewhere? (Keep in mind that it is possible for the state to do both if it reviews nutrient analyses done by an SFA using a NuMenus or Assisted NuMenus system but does the actual nutrient analyses for SFAs using food-based systems.)

If the SFA uses NuMenus, the reviewers review the existing analysis if it is conducted on USDA-approved software, but the analysis is not redone by the state. If there is no approved analysis for the NuMenus or if the SFA uses a food-based system, the staff at the state office conduct the analysis.

15. At what point would it be best to have the nutrient analysis information sent to the FNS? From the state? From the reviewers themselves? Why?

It would be best to send the information directly from the state rather than from the reviewers. The state does most of the analyses. Also, in 1998–1999 the state was starting to put the results of the analyses in a database, which could easily be sent to the FNS as often
as necessary. The database can be amended to contain any information that the FNS requires.

16. Which of these steps, if any, would need to change in order to meet the FNS’s goals for the selected data elements being sent in electronic format?

None of them.

17. It is possible that, in the future, the FNS may be able to negotiate with the companies that have created the nutrient analysis software to add a function where you would be able to create the report for the FNS right from the software. If that were to happen, what changes would you need to make to your current procedure?

Probably none. However, there is some concern about the analysis information being sent directly to the FNS without being reviewed by anyone at the state. Also, the state would want to get a copy of the information for its files.

18. Which of the required data elements are currently missing from the software package you are using for your nutrient analyses?

Average daily number of lunches served during the week in which the analysis was done. The reviewers can get the average daily number of lunches for the month or day for the whole SFA or for the reviewed school, but they cannot get the average daily number of lunches for each meal plan within the SFA. State staff asked whether the average daily number of lunches could be estimated.

19. If the software companies do not agree to add this function, how will you incorporate the additional elements into an electronic report for the FNS?

The state will add them to the database.

20. Do you think that there are any data elements that should be added to or deleted from the list to send to the FNS? If so, which items and why?

The state staff were not sure why average daily number of meals served for the week in review is necessary. They also thought that the name of the SFA should be added.
21. Do you have any opinion on sending the information to the FNS electronically? Will this create any problems for your state?

It should not be a problem.

22. How often do you think the states should have to report this information to the FNS? The FNS is required to prepare an annual strategic plan. Therefore, it is leaning toward annual collection of this information. Would this cause problems for your state?

The state can send the information as often as the FNS wishes because the information can come directly from its database. Annually would not be a problem.

23. Can you think of any alternatives for any of the processes we have discussed so far?

The staff would prefer to send the information from the Access database rather than setting up a new report for the FNS. The database could be altered to have whatever information the FNS needs.

24. The FNS would like us to solicit comments from the state about this process. Do you have anything that you would like us to pass on to them?

It is a good idea to have a consistent reporting system. The staff are also interested in knowing how California compares with other states, since there is currently no way to know this. Most SFAs in the state use food-based menu systems; the state consultants do those analyses. The nutrient-based systems, in which SFAs do their own analyses, tend to be mostly in elementary schools—probably because the elementary school children have less choice in what they eat. Also, food-based systems are more familiar to people used to the old meal plans.

DATA ELEMENTS

The state staff felt that these data elements were fine. They suggested adding “Name of the SFA” and a comment field for the meal plan type, so that the person filing the report could specify what the “Other” choice was, if necessary. They also discussed changing the
dates to give the dates for the review week and the date the review was closed (as opposed to completed). Finally, they suggested further consideration of the data element that asks for the average daily number of lunches served for the week in review. This would be very difficult to collect, so estimation may be appropriate.

They also suggested adding a line showing that the first set of listed nutrients asks for the actual output from the nutrient analysis, whereas the second list is the standard to which the first is being compared to clarify that it is not a duplicate list.