

# Research Rundown

## Article:

## Disaster Management and School Nutrition: A Qualitative Study of Emergency Feeding During the COVID-19 Pandemic

### What did this study examine?

The objective of this study was to explore the experience of school nutrition employees as they provided emergency feeding services during the COVID-19 pandemic and evaluate their actions based on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.



#### Who was surveyed?

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted via video conferencing recording experiences of various school nutrition team members (director, managers, state agency director, nutrition coordinators, etc.) from all seven USDA regions across the US.

#### Research Hot Takes

- NSLP is the 2nd largest nutrition assistance program that served 20 million free meals & 1.7 million reduced price meals in 2019.
- It was estimated that 1.15 billion meals, both breakfast and lunch, were NOT served between March 9th and May 1st of 2020.
- Even with the nationwide waivers, 80% of school nutrition program directors reported that they were serving fewer meals than usual.

#### Emerging Themes

1. Shock, Flexibility and Routine: The COVID-19 pandemic shocked the entire school nutrition system, requiring new routines & flexibility.
2. Keeping People Safe: Safety is a priority for each and every nutrition team and was a concern during the pandemic.
3. The Value of School Nutrition: School nutrition teams were previously in the shadow of the community. The pandemic exposed that school nutrition is ESSENTIAL in the time of emergency & disaster.
4. Communication and Accountability: New insights on communication & accountability during an emergency.

## Key Findings:

### Opportunities for improvement...

Invite **everyone** to the table to share their perspective in future risk reduction planning.

Develop **comprehensive** disaster preparedness training materials for the various nutrition team members.

Identify channels of communication during disaster and increase **speed** of communication throughout the district.

## Put it into practice!

- In your facility, conduct a “Lessons Learned” Forum for all team members to:
  - Share their lived experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic & process the collective trauma.
  - Reflect on how job descriptions and task owners evolved in the face of emergency.
  - Develop a plan to speed up communication pathways (i.e., telephone tree or social media).
  - Discuss ideas to seek increased compensation as essential workers during emergencies.
  - Ensure your disaster preparedness plans prepare you and your team to switch operations to support a financially viable emergency feeding program in future crises.

### Reference:

Patten EV, Spruance L, Vaterlaus JM, Jones M, Beckstead E. Disaster Management and School Nutrition: A Qualitative Study of Emergency Feeding During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. 2021;121(8):1441-1453. doi:10.1016/j.jand.2021.04.012



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