

INTERVIEW WITH ANNA APOIAN



Job Title: Nutrition Services Director

Employed by: Hawthorne School District

Contact Information: Apoian@hawthorne.k1

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO A CAREER IN SCHOOL NUTRITION?

The pay and schedule are very compatible with a family schedule. You have holidays off in school nutrition, compared to clinical. Another major benefit is an extremely tight network and support system with colleagues.

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN PRACTICING AS A SCHOOL NUTRITIONIST?

I worked for five years as a nutritionist where I did menu analysis, staff training, and nutrition education for students. I then worked as a Clinical Dietitian and became a Certified Diabetes Educator. Now I have been working as the Director at Hawthorne for 12 years.

DESCRIBE YOUR FIRST JOB EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOL NUTRITION.

I was one of the first that did menu analysis through the SHAPE program, a state pilot program. Here I worked with manufacturers to ensure they had their proper food specifications, trained staff on menus and recipes, and conducted lesson plans in the classroom for younger students. My boss, Meg Chesley, was a wonderful mentor. I recommend being very careful and particular with whom you choose as your boss. Meg was creative and a smart business woman. She supported and helped me to become who I am today.

DESCRIBE THE TYPE OF WORK YOU CURRENTLY DO.

As a Director, I am responsible for a budget of \$7 million and a Department with over 100 employees. We do our own general ledger. I write my bids for foods, paper goods, and services. I oversee the development of the menu and operations. I ensure the policies and procedures are in place and that monitor standard operating procedures, making sure they are correctly applied. When I first got this job, someone told me that 50% of this job is public relations. It is important to befriend administrators, principals, parents, staff and students. By building relationships I can be more influential, which will help me in providing for the needs of staff and students.

WHAT BENEFITS DOES YOUR JOB PROVIDE?

The schedule, network, and salary are very good. There is a lot of opportunity from one district to the other, and the health benefits in the past have been good (35-40% of our salary package). Another main benefit is a variety of duties. There are many opportunities to try new things through our associations.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE PROFESSION?

What I like most about the profession is that we are feeding kids every single day. We are feeding nutritious foods to the children and if we can connect with the parents, we can influence them to serve these foods at home as well. Contrary to how the news presents us as making kids overweight and serving them cancer-causing food, I actually see the National School Lunch Program as a change agent. In our bids, we require specific healthy food items. Manufacturers were recently required by the federal government to change their product formulations for the schools. We are now seeing these products in the supermarket and there are now products with lower sodium, less breading, cleaner labels, etc.

WHAT DO YOU LEAST LIKE ABOUT THE PROFESSION? WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU UNDERGO?

The biggest challenge is having patience when it comes to staff issues. It is difficult to document an employee when issues happen. It takes time. Fortunately, I have a wonderful staff and few issues.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR STUDENTS INTERESTED IN GETTING INTO SCHOOL NUTRITION?

If seeking employment in a school district, an intern needs to decide if he/she wants to work in a small district, where they will learn everything because they will do everything. If they want to work in a larger district, they will be more focused, but will learn from others around them. If you want to move forward to a director's position, ensure the job description has some operational experience. Staffing, supervision, operational, and budget experiences are a must. One last recommendation is to take business courses. I would definitely recommend earning an MBA.

ARE YOU WILLING TO MENTOR A DIETETIC STUDENT INTERESTED IN SCHOOL NUTRITION?

I already do that for California State University Long Beach. An intern will have to be recommended by an organization, have their TB test, and fingerprint results available.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

No, but I love the idea of your website!

School Nutrition Tools

