

Tamara Earl, SNS
Silver Rising Star Award

1. Explain the marked changes in the district's school nutrition program due to contributions made by your nominee in the five or fewer years he/she has been the director (give exact number of years of experience).

Tamara aggressively pursues goals she sets for her program; results are remarkable! There is a strong leader emerging here! The largest high school in Ohio is located here – 3,521 students under one roof! She added 5 new points of service (including an all cold item kiosk) resulting in lunch sales increasing each year – another 15% this past year! She introduced cashless lines to speed up service – a necessity when 1,000+ students show up at the same time, another 1,000+, 30 minutes later, another 1000+, 30 minutes after that! Nutrition and Nutrition Education are “job one” at MCS. Tamara has embraced the MyPlate icon and philosophy as a way to teach students the importance of healthy eating and balance. From her decision to add an additional Registered Dietitian to her staff to her investment in signage and training materials, she spent money to teach, support, and display foods following the “smarter lunchroom” concept. Monthly “Spotlight on Nutrition” newsletters reinforce messages. New meal regulations were a challenge at this district where meals had been planned and served under the NSMP. Staff, students, and parents were not used to being offered meals in this “foodbased” format. Boy, did this new director have her work cut out for her! Tamara places importance on good clear communication; she wanted to know her staff could make the transition with confidence. She provided a full day of training to all staff. Learning was delivered via a game show format; prizes were awarded for recognizing a meal under this new way of thinking, serving and accounting. Next, for students and parents – how to tackle this? They need to understand things have changed. She asked, “Can we make this education piece fun, too?”. That question was answered through a video collaboration of her staff, teaching staff, and three classes of first graders. Students sang and danced their way to lunch to the catchy song, “Let’s All Go to the Lunchroom!” Staff showcased meal choices while Tamara exclaimed about the importance and abundance of fruit and vegetable items available in each school! The clever invitation was seen on computers, tablets, and phones at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9u4GxUfgDw&feature=youtu.be>. The video was featured April, 2013 in School Nutrition. 2014 staff in-service included a meal pattern test. From those results she targeted training customized to knowledge gaps. Success? YES! PERFECT Administrative Review in 2015! Recognition of the excellence of meal service is evidenced by the fact that MHS was ranked 14th nationally in 2015 Niche – Schools in America “Best Food” category. Niche ranks 3,868 school districts based on more than 580,000 opinions on food from 215,000 students and parents. A high ranking indicates the district offers a variety of healthy, quality food options, accommodates various dietary preferences like vegan and gluten-free, and the students rate the quality of food favorably. (<https://k12.niche.com/rankings/public-school-districts/best-food/>)

2. Describe the most significant program modification made by your nominee (include measurable results achieved).

I don't believe Tamara is "modifying"; I think she is "reinventing by design". She is positioning the Child Nutrition Department to be an integral education partner; for her staff to be recognized and respected as equals; and for her students to be educated to make healthy choices. Since Tamara took the reins breakfast participation has exploded – up by over 300%. She credits the introduction of breakfast grab and go carts that are located by the entry doors. The district is both blessed and challenged by a very low rate of free and reduced eligible students. (Total for both is 8%). About 500 students from each of the district's 6 buildings receive nutrition education provided by her department each year. She sees that the CN staff has a presence at all Open Houses. Last year, the food waste was a focus of the department. This year's projects are signage to visually identify allergens in all foods served, and working with ESL teachers and students to help them get to know our foods, staff and preparation methods. The high school serves a whopping 2700 servings of FRESH fruits and vegetables daily – up 25% last year– many selected as ala carte items from a display that is meant to encourage healthy consumption whether a meal is selected or not. She knows her customer, and is offering the healthiest choices to align with the "Smarter Lunchroom" techniques! Tamara realizes that sometimes the customer is #2 – getting staff onboard needs to happen first! If her staff is not well trained in nutrition, and confident in the important role they play in the building, her ambitious goals for the program will not be realized. She provides many opportunities for professional growth, and empowers them to be effective in their important positions. She shares the following quote with them, "School people cannot change neighborhoods, cannot solve serious social and economic problems and cannot completely erase early trauma or deficits that children bring to school. But school people can change school. From the moment a child crosses the threshold of the school house, he or she is in a special place – a place where good things should happen, not by chance, but by design." Paul D. Houston, AASA Exec Building partnerships is hard work, takes time, and often goes unnoticed. The following was recorded on Tamara's performance evaluation at the conclusion of her second year as director: "I also wish to recognize the importance of what you are doing to involve students, teachers, professionals, and parents in the program. Child Nutrition has become (under your leadership) a positive conversation piece around the district."

3. Describe your nominee's professional background and how he/she entered the school nutrition profession.

One of the first jobs she applied for when she graduated from college with her Food Management degree was in school foodservice in Indianapolis, IN. She recalls it was the longest line ever of applicants. She didn't even get an interview. She is amazed that in her mid-40's, she would have the opportunity to have a career in school foodservice! How she has embraced this opportunity! She was Assistant Child Nutrition Supervisor for 11 years with Mason City Schools, preparing herself for the day she would lead! She attended meetings and trainings and sought out leadership opportunities to be ready for the challenges that come with being a school foodservice director. She worked toward, and earned, the SNS (School Nutrition Specialist) credential. She is an active member and past president of the Ohio School Business Officials Food and Nutrition Chapter. She also purchased her own membership to the Society for Human Resource Management to increase her access to HR information and resources. She has been federal legislation

chair for the School Nutrition Association of Ohio, and is currently the past-president of SNA of OH. As president elect and then president she moved the state organization forward. The conference she planned offered the School Nutrition Specialist (SNS) credential exam. Tamara felt very committed to finding a way to support persons who might want to prepare for the exam. She helped develop, launch and deliver a 10 webinar series called, "Essential Competencies of School Nutrition Specialists". SNA of Ohio increased the number of SNS credentialed members by 24% this year! Another success! While serving as president, SNA of OH revamped the By-laws and established an Industry Council. The association was able to expand by establishing the region in the southeast corner of the state which had no one participating and scheduled a fall focus seminar there this year! Additionally, she worked to launch a new chapter to provide meetings and education for another underserved area of the state. In 2015 she attended Georgetown University/SNA Executive Management Program. She continues to grow in her leadership - is on SNA's national committee for Resolutions and By-laws . Tamara works long hours to assure her district and her partnerships succeed. She was thrilled to have one school receive the Healthier US School Challenge award this past year. She has initiated partnerships with community physicians, Children's Hospital, and the University of Cincinnati Dietetic Intern program. With the remains of the day Tamara donates her time and skills to causes she believes in. She has cooked for Prison Ministry and Homeless Hospitality. She has volunteered over many years to raise funds and awareness for fibromyalgia. She supports SNA scholarship fundraising with the gift of both her time and her money. Tamara Earl, SNS, is definitely a rising star - rocking the world of Child Nutrition!

Please consider her for this FAME Award.