

**2017 FAME SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
GAY ANDERSON**

1. What specific achievements demonstrate your nominee's ability to recognize and solve problems unique to small school districts (give exact enrollment)?

Gay Anderson is the Foodservice Director for Brandon Valley 49-2, a school district located on the eastern edge of South Dakota, bordering Minnesota and Iowa. The 128 square mile district covers the communities of Brandon, Valley Springs, Corson, and Rowena with an enrollment of 3,975 students. School nutrition programs in small school districts are unique in that they must address all the complex challenges facing school nutrition programs today with very limited resources, both capital and human, and a support network that is spread across a vast rural area. For a small school district, barely meeting the minimum child nutrition program requirements while depending on general education fund support is the norm, but not in Brandon Valley. Gay Anderson's hard work, ingenuity, and tenacity rank her school nutrition program among the best in the Midwest. Gay can't depend on the support of an administrative staff, so she has become an expert in many areas of school nutrition.

Gay has been the chair of the district health and wellness committee since 2005. She initiated a district-wide community health fair in 2006 with the goal of attracting 250 participants. Over 800 community members attended the health fair that year and the annual event has grown to over 2100 participants, earning the school district the South Dakota Governor's Healthy School District Award and the USDA Mountain Plains Region Healthy School Award. Brandon Valley has three schools that earned the Bronze Award with the HealthierUS School Challenge. Three schools have also achieved Bronze recognition with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. But Gay's commitment to health and wellness doesn't stop there. Each year she visits a minimum of 45 class rooms, teaching children about good nutrition. She reinforces that message as a regular speaker at PTA meetings. All of her schools are partnered with The Alliance for a Healthier Generation and her school district was the first in South Dakota to pilot and participate in the Fuel Up to Play 60 grant program sponsored by the National Dairy Council.

Gay extends her health and wellness reach by providing employee training in nutrition and food safety. All 49 school nutrition employees are ServSafe certified. Recognizing the need for training and the challenges of providing it in a rural state, Gay organized the first-of-its-kind joint coalition for regional training in South Dakota giving access to critical training for multiple school districts. She serves as a preceptor for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics dietetic internship program encouraging dietetic students to consider careers in school nutrition. Gay has gone on to become an Institute of Child Nutrition (formerly National Food Service Management Institute) trainer. She served as chair of the School Nutrition Association (SNA) Education Committee, affording her a seat on the SNA Board of Directors. This was her second term on the Board having previously served as Midwest Regional Director. In school year 2015-16, Gay served on the School Nutrition Foundation Board of Directors.

One of the best ways to improve student health and academic performance is through the School Breakfast Program. But getting school board approval to add the program in a district with only 16 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced price meals is no easy task, especially in a rural farming state with strong farm family values. Gay eventually sold the school board on the idea. However, participation rates were low due to no access to the program after the bell. Gay's ingenuity led to a pilot named the Second Chance breakfast program at one of her schools. Students were allowed a grab and go breakfast after the bell and student participation soared by 216 percent. The new program was quickly implemented in all schools. On the heels of that success, Gay was able to convince the school board to waive the student fee of 30 cents for reduced price breakfasts. Gay wears many hats, from health and wellness leader, nutrition educator, professional development trainer, to nutrition advocate. She has improved the nutrition of children, not only in her district, but in all of South Dakota.

2. Describe the most significant problem your nominee dealt with and how he/she overcame the obstacles (include measurable results achieved).

School nutrition programs are judged on many levels, student participation rates, quality of the food served, and meeting strict nutrition standards to name a few. However, operating a program that is fiscally solvent is critical. Gay's most significant contribution to Brandon Valley was creating a financially sound school nutrition program.

Gay previously worked in the healthcare industry bringing a keen sense of fiscal responsibility to the Brandon Valley schools. Gay hit the ground running in Brandon Valley by evaluating their procurement practices and implementing a prime vendor contract that delivered immediate efficiencies and cost savings. But Gay didn't stop there. She went on to organize a buying coalition with other school districts that was first of its kind in the state of South Dakota. After its first year, the coalition member districts reduced their food costs by three percent, occurring in a year when drought drove food prices up. Gay continues to lead the coalition benefiting not only Brandon Valley schools, but the other coalition member schools.

Coming from healthcare, Gay was not familiar with the USDA Foods Program (commodities). But she quickly discovered that Brandon Valley was utilizing only 20 percent of their commodity allocation leaving valuable commodity dollars on the table. Gay submerged herself into learning how the commodity program works. She quickly revamped her menu planning system and organized her USDA Foods management process yielding 100 percent commodity utilization in the first year. Being an innovator, Gay advocated for the use of Net-Off-Invoice (NOI) for commodity processing when it became available from USDA. She organized and led the effort to establish NOI for the state of South Dakota, working with the South Dakota Department of Education and the food distribution industry in her state. She met with the South Dakota Secretary of Education to educate and advocate for USDA Foods and NOI. She enlisted the support of her superintendent to write a letter to the Secretary requesting that Brandon Valley commodity allocation to be utilized through NOI. Brandon Valley was one of 12 school districts chosen to pilot the NOI program for one year. The school district achieved

\$42,000 in savings by using NOI as their value pass through system in its first year. The pilot program's success led to statewide implementation the following year. Gay helped to organize schools districts and train them on using the NOI system. Brandon Valley was challenged with increased food costs when the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act required increased servings of fruit and vegetables. Gay sprung into action and designed and implemented a plate waste study. The study revealed that 67 percent of the vegetables and 32 percent of the fruits served daily were being discarded in the trash. This represented an average of 51 cents per student loss to plate waste. Gay's plan of action was to train her staff to engage with the students in the serving line to encourage them to select fruits and vegetables that they liked and would eat. She also enlisted the help of the teaching staff to encourage students. Subsequent plate waste studies resulted in a 73 percent reduction in plate waste, reducing the per student loss to 13 cents per plate. The results of her efforts to reduce waste lowered their waste removal costs and created positive public relations with parents and school district staff.

3. Describe your nominee's specific talents or skills for being successful in a small district.

Gay Anderson's talents are many. Among her strongest skills are her excellent communication skills, her ability to be an innovator, and leading school nutrition programs in Brandon Valley and the state of South Dakota as a change agent. Gay's ability to communicate clearly and with passion has built strong rapport with parents, teachers, administrative staff, and school board. The Superintendent and board members understand and respect the business of child nutrition, thanks to Gay's communication skills and ability to nurture relationships. Recently retired Superintendent David Pappone says of Gay, "Gay Anderson is an outstanding leader who is recognized throughout South Dakota and nationally through her role on the executive board of the School Nutrition Association. Gay is a driving force behind the formation of the Eastern South Dakota Food Buying Group that pools the needs of school nutrition programs in the region to get the best possible pricing. She has completed her college degree in business while working full time and is now enrolled in a MBA program. Finally, Gay has taken on the role of Wellness Coordinator for the district where she works closely with parents, teachers and nurses to promote overall health in our community."

Gay's talent for innovation is evident in her many accomplishments, from creating a community health fair and the Second Chance breakfast program to her work in reducing waste through a plate waste study. Gay also introduced innovations in the layout and design of the Brandon Valley High School Café to make it an appealing space for students to gather to nourish both body and soul. Gay's efforts to introduce South Dakota to NOI, establish the first buying coalition in the state, and serve as a trainer and mentor to South Dakota school districts have established her as a change agent and leader in child nutrition.

On top of all her hard work and accomplishments, Gay has somehow found the time to return to college to pursue her bachelor's degree in business management. She graduated in May 2015. Gay set her sights on her next goal, to be President of the

School Nutrition Association, and she is well on her way after being installed as Vice-President at the 2016 Annual National Conference in San Antonio, Texas.