
SECTION 6 – STAFF WELLNESS

Definition

Staff wellness/health promotion is defined as opportunities for school staff members to improve their health status through activities such as health assessments, health education and health-related fitness activities. These opportunities encourage school staff to pursue a healthy lifestyle that contributes to improved health status, improved morale, and a greater personal commitment to the school's overall coordinated health program. This personal commitment often transfers into greater commitment to the health of students and creates positive role modeling. Health promotion activities have improved productivity, decreased absenteeism and reduced health insurance costs (CDC, 2005).

Rationale

Healthy, engaged teachers and staff are essential supports for student learning. Staff wellness programs contribute to an overall healthy school environment and climate, affecting all members of the school community—students, faculty and other staff, and families—as well as all other aspects of the health of the wider school community. Health promotion and wellness programs for staff encourage all adults in the school to pursue healthy lifestyles. A healthy lifestyle includes physical, social, emotional and mental health. Personal commitment by school staff to learning about and leading healthy lives can contribute to students' greater understanding and commitment to better health and strengthen the coordinated school health approach. Staff role modeling demonstrates to students the benefits of leading healthy physical and social lives. Moreover, better overall health for the adults in school improves morale. Districts with formal staff wellness programs experience savings in health care costs; higher daily attendance by staff; increased staff loyalty, job satisfaction, morale and retention; and improved general health and well-being. Site-based staff wellness programs are health promoting and preventive efforts that work. Workplaces that feature programs and activities that promote workers' health are more attractive to prospective employees, present a positive community image, and experience increased productivity.



This section presents policy recommendations, policy rationale, implementation strategies and resources for staff wellness.

Policy Recommendations

A comprehensive school staff wellness program requires an environment that values, supports and protects the well-being of teachers, staff and students; an organizational structure that incorporates policies, goals and objectives addressing school staff wellness and safety into the school and district culture; and the commitment of resources to health promotion, disease prevention and occupational safety.

Policy recommendations for staff wellness address the following nine areas.

1. **Health promoting actions.** The district shall disseminate information, build awareness, provide health education, and support health-promoting activities that focus on skill development and lifestyle behavior change for staff members.
2. **Access to facilities.** Staff shall have access to facilities that meet employee wellness needs and interests.
3. **Application of nutrition standards.** Nutrition standards shall apply to all foods and beverages, including those in vending machines available to staff members.
4. **Tobacco use policies.** All use of tobacco by students, staff members and visitors shall be prohibited on school grounds.
5. **Safe social and physical environments.** Social and physical environments shall be safe and supportive, supported by district expectations of healthy behaviors and implementation of policies that promote health and safety and reduce the risk of disease.
6. **Integration of the staff wellness program.** The staff wellness program shall be integrated into district and school culture and structure.
7. **Linkage with other programs.** Staff wellness programs shall be linked to related programs such as employee assistance programs, emergency care, and programs that help employees balance work and family life.
8. **Worksite screening programs.** The district shall offer worksite screening programs linked to medical care to ensure follow up and appropriate treatment, as necessary.
9. **Evaluation and improvement.** The district shall conduct ongoing evaluation to inform the improvement of the staff wellness program's effectiveness and efficiency.

Adapted from: *Healthy People 2010* <http://www.healthypeople.gov/> and *The National Association of State Boards of Education*: <http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org/resources/SchoolStaffWellness.pdf>.

Policy Rationale and Implementation Strategies

School boards, superintendents, central office personnel, building principals, health educators and physical educators, school nurses, food service staff, custodians and maintainers, school mental health professionals, and all other staff can play a variety of roles in the development, promotion, implementation and evaluation of the staff wellness program. Many of these people can do so within the ordinary scope of their employment in a school and district, often without additional monetary cost. School and community organizations, such as the PTA/PTO, can become involved in all of these capacities as well, and can potentially be the source of both moral and financial support for school staff wellness programs. Getting most, if not all, on board with the school or district's wellness movement can benefit the climate, morale and overall wellness of the school.

Suggested steps for developing and maintaining a staff wellness program:

1. Identify a coordinator
2. Secure support of policy makers
3. Form a wellness committee
4. Conduct a survey of employees' needs and interests
5. Develop a mission, goals and objectives for the program
6. Evaluate the program at regular intervals

As part of a coordinated school health approach school staff wellness programs can draw on many district and community resources such as swimming pools, weight training equipment and facilities, running tracks and par-fit courses, and other recreational facilities to promote physical activity. Physical education staff can provide instruction about developing and maintaining fitness and lifelong physical activity. Fundraisers, celebrations and school food service programs can provide settings for promoting good nutrition. School health staff can assist with screenings, health education and immunizations. Maintenance and risk management staff can ensure the safety of the workplace. As with any complex program, a comprehensive staff wellness program needs to evolve over time. A well-developed program will address the health and wellness of staff as comprehensively as the school and district programs designed to promote the health of students and their families. In this way, health becomes integral to the climate and culture of the entire school community.

1. **Health promoting actions.** The district shall disseminate information, build awareness, provide health education, and support health-promoting activities that focus on skill development and lifestyle behavior change for staff members.

Effective educational programs aimed at reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors lead to behavior change that improves health.

Implementation strategies include:

- ✧ Provide health promotion programs such as health screenings, physical activity and fitness programs, nutrition education, weight management, smoking cessation, and stress management.

- ✧ Encourage staff participation by introducing wellness programs to new staff at orientation sessions, presenting information at regular staff meetings, enclosing fliers and brochures with paychecks, providing information in newsletters and e-mail messages, and offering health insurance discounts for participants.
- ✧ Organize health expos or fairs and promote attendance by school personnel. Local hospitals, health maintenance organizations, and health departments are usually willing partners in organizing such events.
- ✧ Provide education and resources to help employees make informed decisions about health care.
- ✧ Provide release time so that employees can participate in health-promoting activities.
- ✧ Provide information to employees regarding issues related to wellness and aging, which may include health insurance benefits upon retirement.

2. Access to facilities. Staff shall have access to facilities that meet employee wellness needs and interests.

Adults are more likely to engage and continue participation in programs when those programs and activities interest them, when they feel that the programs are relevant to them, and when programs and facilities are easily accessible and safe.

Implementation strategies include:

- ✧ Provide school personnel wellness activity facilities, such as a staff fitness center, or allow staff to use the school facilities during unassigned time, and before and after school.
- ✧ Accommodate staff with short- or long-term disabilities.
- ✧ Arrange with community partners for use of physical activity facilities, such as walking or running tracks, fit-trails, fitness centers, swimming pools and racquet sports courts for school personnel at no or reduced cost.
- ✧ Develop a yearly calendar of wellness activities based on monthly or seasonal themes.

3. Application of nutrition standards. Nutrition standards shall apply to all foods and beverages, including those in vending machines available to staff members.

Healthy eating helps people stay in shape, feel good and avoid risk factors that can lead to heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes. Unfortunately, many people do not heed national nutrition recommendations, such as the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *MyPyramid*. In combination with insufficient physical activity, this behavior is resulting in more Americans becoming overweight than ever before.

Implementation strategies include:

- ✧ Prepare, adopt and implement a plan that ensures qualified food preparation and food service staff, pleasant eating areas for staff and students, and an overall environment that encourages healthy food choices and healthy eating behaviors.

- ✧ Ensure that school nutrition programs offer options during cultural celebrations and for staff and students with dietary and cultural restrictions.
- ✧ Stock vending machines with healthy foods and beverages or identify alternative sources of funding to replace vending machine revenues (see Section 4, School Nutrition Services, for additional information on healthy food choices at school).

4. *Tobacco use policies.* All use of tobacco by students, staff members and visitors shall be prohibited on school grounds.

Tobacco causes more preventable deaths in the United States than poor eating habits and physical inactivity combined. People who avoid tobacco use can expect to live healthier, longer lives.

Implementation strategies include:

- ✧ Establish policies, if not already in place, that prohibit tobacco advertising and tobacco use on school property, in school vehicles, and at school-sponsored events.
- ✧ Publicize and uniformly enforce tobacco use policies.
- ✧ Offer smoking cessation programs to staff and students.
- ✧ Offer incentives for participation in smoking cessation programs and continued abstinence.

5. *Safe social and physical environments.* Social and physical environments shall be safe and supportive, supported by district expectations of healthy behaviors and implementation of policies that promote health and safety and reduce the risk of disease.

The social environment affects the choices that people make. Policies that support healthy behaviors and discourage unhealthy ones can positively influence school culture. Safe, supportive, pleasant and enjoyable settings will contribute to greater receptiveness to health-promoting activities and policies. Maintaining a health-promoting environment requires not only establishing a social and psychological climate that supports the attitudes, feelings and values of all staff but also removing or reducing physical hazards that might cause injuries and illness.

Implementation strategies include:

- ✧ Minimize staff exposure to environmental hazards, physical dangers, and the possibility of injuries that can be incurred while supervising sports, science experiments, art and industrial arts classes, food preparation, and off-campus activities.
- ✧ Educate staff about ergonomic precautions, such as proper desk set-ups for support staff and proper lifting techniques for maintenance staff and those who assist with lifting students with special needs.
- ✧ Teach proper handling of needles and syringes for health services providers and universal precautions for those who might come in contact with human tissue and fluids.
- ✧ Provide staff with adequate safety equipment and educate them in its proper use.

- ✧ Inform staff about safety and involve them in the development and revision of safety policies and procedures.
- ✧ Consider inspections by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to verify compliance with safety standards.
- ✧ Reduce stress and burnout by helping staff feel valued.
- ✧ Respect the social, economic and cultural backgrounds of an increasingly diverse work force.
- ✧ Ensure that the district complies with accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- ✧ Enforce and ensure that staff members understand policies that address sexual and other harassment.

6. *Integration of the staff wellness program.* The staff wellness program shall be integrated into district and school culture and structure.

Programs that are integrated throughout school and district culture and support the district's mission are more likely to receive support than unincorporated standalone activities. School staff health promotion serves the district's mission by benefiting teaching and learning. Incorporating a coordinated approach to wellness for all persons in the school community—students and their families, school staff, as well as volunteers and the community—can increase effectiveness and sustainability.

Implementation strategies include:

- ✧ Designate a district-level staff wellness coordinator to be a member of the district coordinated school health team. The coordinator should be able to lead and coordinate, committed to good nutrition and a physically active lifestyle, and willing to build interest, participation and support by advocating for wellness.
- ✧ Establish a broadly representative wellness committee that holds regular meetings to ensure continuity, motivation and broad ownership of the program.
- ✧ Be prepared to demonstrate the benefits of a staff wellness program and how it supports the district's mission to the board of education, the superintendent and principals, and key community leaders. Provide information about the costs of the program in terms of staff, time, facilities, resources and actual dollars; scheduling and facilities requirements; compatibility with and improvement of school image and culture; and program implementation plans. Include the long-term fiscal benefits to the district, such as projected health insurance savings, reduction of absenteeism and risk and injury to staff, and increased staff retention.
- ✧ Develop and conduct a survey to determine employee wants and needs. A wellness program is about behavioral change; people will be more willing to participate when they are involved in the change process.
- ✧ Develop a mission statement, goals, objectives and a plan based on the needs and interests of school staff. This will establish a foundation that will be sustained over time.
- ✧ Feature wellness at staff development days to demonstrate system-wide support for school staff wellness activities.

- ❖ Schedule an annual cycle of staff health promotion activities.
- ❖ Plan to address diverse racial, cultural, ethnic and linguistic needs and interests of staff related to health promotion, for example, create a multicultural calendar that respects the range of culturally important dates among school staff. Avoid scheduling meetings or other important events on the major holidays of any religious group.
- ❖ Develop a plan of incentives and recognition for participation in school wellness activities.
- ❖ Establish a fun atmosphere and positive reinforcement for participation.
- ❖ Encourage adherence to and completion of personal improvement programs.
- ❖ Involve school staff in the development and revision of staff wellness policies and procedures.



7. *Linkage with other programs.* Staff wellness programs shall be linked to related programs such as employee assistance programs, emergency care, and programs that help employees balance work and family life.

Services such as employee assistance programs and emergency care supplement or expand the district's capacity to address the complex health needs of staff. These services can be obtained through contracts with agencies that specialize in employee assistance services, an agreement with a hospital or other health care provider, or district employees with specialized training.

Implementation strategies include:

- ❖ Provide free, confidential, short-term counseling to help employees identify and deal with stressful problems.
- ❖ Include comprehensive counseling, help for balancing work and family and other personal responsibilities, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation.
- ❖ Ensure that the social environment of the work site encourages school staff members to discuss stressful situations with their supervisors and other staff.
- ❖ Familiarize managers and supervisors with employee assistance programs to provide them with the information they need to know how and when to make referrals or recommendations to employees who seek help.
- ❖ During school crises, such as a disaster, personal loss or school emergency, use the school crisis team to provide staff with assistance to deal with their own grief reactions to enable them to be helpful to students.

8. *Worksite screening programs.* The district shall offer worksite screening programs linked to medical care to ensure follow up and appropriate treatment, as necessary.

Screenings help to raise awareness by informing staff about health risks and identify health problems before they escalate into more serious conditions.

Implementation strategies include:

- ✧ Provide an immunization program for school personnel.
- ✧ Develop and implement a disease prevention education program for all school personnel, including informational programs on bloodborne pathogens, sun safety, and respiratory diseases such as influenza and asthma.
- ✧ Incorporate screenings into health fairs, including risk assessments such as Body Mass Index (BMI), blood pressure or cholesterol.
- ✧ Partner with local hospitals or other health care providers to provide screenings.
- ✧ Plan for individual follow-up interventions to support behavior change or treat identified conditions.

9. *Evaluation and improvement.* The district shall conduct ongoing evaluation to inform the improvement of the staff wellness program's effectiveness and efficiency.

Evaluation helps to identify what needs to happen, determine how well objectives are being met, find out whether the program is making a difference, and guide improvements. Evaluation is an ongoing process and includes needs assessments, ratings by program participants, and impact data.

Implementation strategies include:

- ✧ Establish baseline data to provide a standard for measuring progress.
- ✧ Regularly survey the school personnel to identify needs and interests.
- ✧ Document the staff wellness program development and implementation process, tracking information such as ideas considered, activities and programs offered, attendance at activities, feedback from participants, screenings offered and data from those screenings, and community assessments.
- ✧ Incorporate evaluation into the staff wellness program design to ensure a systematic, organized approach to assessing program offerings and making improvements.
- ✧ Use data collection strategies that include but are not limited to pre- and post-surveying of employees and participants, suggestion or comments box, and informal polling by members of the wellness committee.
- ✧ Use feedback from staff and other data to make decisions regarding continuation, modification, addition or elimination of staff wellness activities.
- ✧ Track costs and benefits and report regularly to decision makers.

Legislation Pertaining to Staff Wellness

Connecticut does not currently have any legislation related to staff wellness in schools.

References

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- Healthy People 2010: Goals for the Nation*, 2007. <http://www.healthypeople.gov/>. Retrieved on January 8, 2007.
- The National Association of Boards of Education, 2007. *School Staff Wellness Policies*. <http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org/resources/SchoolStaffWellness.pdf>. Retrieved on January 8, 2007.

Resources

- Addressing the Challenges: Staff Wellness*, Council of Chief State School Officers:
http://www.ccsso.org/projects/School_Health_Project/Addressing_the_Challenges/6499.cfm
- American Association for Active Lifestyles & Fitness:
<http://www.aahperd.confex.com/aahperd/2002/finalprogram/AAALF.htm>
- Connecticut Department of Public Health Obesity Program:
<http://www.dph.state.ct.us/bch/HEMS/Obesity.html>
- Connecticut State Department of Education Coordinated School Health Partnerships:
<http://www.ct.gov/sde/healthyconneCTions>
- ConnectiFIT - Keeping Connecticut Healthy: <http://www.connectifit.uconn.edu>
- Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide. Part 1: Physical activity, healthy eating and tobacco-use prevention*, National Association of State Boards of Education:
http://www.nasbe.org/healthy_schools/FHRTL.htm
- Health Is Academic: A Guide to Coordinated School Health Programs*, Marx, E., Wooley, S.F., and Northrop, D., eds., Teachers College Press, 1999: <http://store.tcpspress.com/0807737135.shtml>
- Health, Mental Health, and Safety Guidelines for Schools*, American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses, 2005:
http://www.aap.org/bst/showdetl.cfm?&DID=15&Product_ID=4068&CatID=132
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- Healthy People 2010, Volumes 1 and 2*, US Department of Health and Human Services, 2000.
<http://www.healthypeople.gov/>
- Local School Wellness Policies*, School Nutrition Association:
<http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Index.aspx?id=2131>
- National Education Association (NEA) Health and Employee Wellness:
<http://www.nea.org/memberservices/health-wellness.html>
- School Employee Wellness: A Guide for Protecting the Assets of Our Nation's Schools*, Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2007: <http://www.schoolempwell.org/>
- School Staff Wellness*, National Association of State Boards of Education:
<http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org/resources/SchoolStaffWellness.pdf>
- The Wellness Councils of American (WELCOA)*:
<http://www.welcoa.org/freeresources/index.php?category=8>
- Why Wellness Works*, Wellness Councils of America and Canada: <http://www.welcoa.org>
- WIC Works Learning Center Staff Wellness - National Employee Health and Fitness*, National Association for Health and Fitness: http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Learning_Center/Staff_Wellness.html

