

School Employee Wellness

How to Support Health for Your Employees



Why Staff Wellness?

Teachers and other school employees are charged with educating and caring for one of our nation's most precious assets – our children. Therefore, it is imperative that school employees are supported in their efforts to stay healthy and active so that they can do their job most effectively.

Physical Health. Two-thirds of all deaths in the US can be attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes. The top risk factors for these diseases – tobacco use, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, and overweight – can be modified through healthy lifestyle behaviors. Staff wellness programs can target these lifestyle behaviors and significantly reduce disease risk among school employees!

Academics. Employees who participate in wellness programs have lower absenteeism rates.¹ Lower absenteeism in schools means that teachers are in the classroom more and students learn better! In addition, teachers are important role models for kids. If teachers are healthy and active, their students are likely to follow. When kids are healthy and active, they perform better in school!

Financial Health. Because of the rapid increase in lifestyle-related diseases (diabetes, obesity, heart disease), healthcare costs have increased dramatically. Effective wellness programs can help employers contain these costs. For each additional health risk factor that an employee has, it costs approximately \$350 extra per year.² For every \$1 spent on wellness programs, an average of \$3.50 is saved.¹

¹Whitmer, R.W., Pelletier, K.R., Anderson, D.R., Baase, C.M., and Frost, C.J. (2003). A wake-up call for corporate America. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 45:9,916-925.

²O'Donnell, M.P. (2002). Employer's financial perspective on workplace health promotion in *Health Promotion in the workplace*, 3rd ed. Albany, NY: Delmar.

Starting Staff Wellness

Before starting a new staff wellness program, do your homework and find out what resources your school district currently offers to support staff wellness. Talk to your human resources or benefits department to see if they have any programs or resources related to employee wellness.

1. Get Administration Support

Getting administrative buy-in is an essential first step to beginning a staff wellness program. Talk to your principal, superintendent, and school board about staff wellness and why it is important. Getting administrative support early on in the wellness process will help your team be successful in the future.

2. Integrate with the School Wellness Team

Staff wellness programs should be part of your school's overall plan for supporting school wellness. If your school does not already have a team working on overall school wellness, see the "Your Wellness Team" section of the CanDo School Wellness Resource Kit to get started. The school wellness team should work together to decide how to best support healthy lifestyles for school employees.

3. Conduct an Employee Wellness Interest Survey

Ask school employees what kind of wellness programs and topics they are most interested in. See the sample Employee Wellness Interest Survey in the CanDo School Wellness Resource Kit. Modify this survey as needed to fit your school. Keep the surveys confidential and report the overall results to the school staff and administration.

4. Choose Appropriate Wellness Interventions

Use the results from the Employee Wellness Interest Survey to help determine what types of wellness activities will be most effective for your employees. Refer to the "Resources" section of the CanDo School Wellness Resource Kit for local resources and organizations that can help support staff wellness programs. Use the School Wellness Action Plan template in the "Your Wellness Team" section of the CanDo School Wellness Resource Kit to write out your action plan.

5. Implement and Evaluate

Implement your staff wellness program and track changes to see if it is effective! Track participation and satisfaction to see if employees enjoyed the programs. Conduct surveys or measurements to see if the wellness program was effective in helping employees make healthy lifestyle changes.

Fort Collins Well City Initiative

In February 2006, CanDo launched a Well City initiative in Fort Collins. With the support of community businesses and partners, Fort Collins will become a designated Well City by 2009.

What is a Well City?

Well City, a recognition program of the Wellness Councils of America (WELCOA), is a community-wide initiative that encourages employers to develop comprehensive worksite wellness programs.

How do you become a Well City?

Cities can receive a Well City designation when at least 20 companies, which make up 15% or more of the city's workforce, have been deemed a Well Workplace. To meet the Well Workplace criteria, a company must have a wellness program that addresses areas such as physical activity, nutrition, and weight management.

Why did CanDo begin the Well City initiative?

The average adult spends nearly 50 hours per week at work. Therefore it is important to create work environments that support employees in making healthy lifestyle habits such as being active and eating healthy.

Is Poudre School District involved in the Well City initiative?

Yes! PSD has formed a school wellness committee to focus on staff wellness. The committee is working hard to find resources and programs to help keep employees healthy and active. For information on the PSD wellness committee for staff wellness, contact the PSD Risk Management Department.

For more information on the Well City initiative, go to www.CanDoOnline.org.

Easy Ways to Support Staff Wellness

Fresh Fruit Basket – Put a fresh fruit basket in the staff lounge. Assign one employee to stock the basket each week. Put a can or envelope beside the basket and ask staff to donate money for the fresh fruit.

Walking Club – Get staff together and go for a power walk before school, during lunch, or after school. Set regular days and times to help keep people on track.

Healthy Foods at Staff Meetings – Offer water, fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins at staff meetings. If junk foods or desserts are served, be sure to cut them in small portions. Try ordering sub sandwiches, wraps, or salads for catered lunches. Ask for light dressings and condiments.

Healthy Vending Options – Talk to your school vendor about putting healthier food options in the staff vending machine. Ask for water, sugar-free flavored water or teas, granola bars, and baked chips.

Fitness Challenge – Organize a friendly competition such as a fitness challenge or weight loss challenge. Be sure to sign up for the Schools on the Move Challenge (970-495-7511 or lh2@pvhs.org) or go to www.AmericaOntheMove.org to organize a pedometer challenge.

Wellness Talks – Bring in health professionals from the community to do wellness talks on topics such as stress management, mental health, healthy eating, and physical activity. Check out the worksite wellness section of the CanDo website for a list of local worksite wellness programs and resources. www.CanDoOnline.org

Recipe Swap & Potluck – Host a staff potluck and ask staff to bring in healthy dishes. Have everyone bring the recipe and exchange with others.

Activity Club – Gather a group of employees to meet in the gym or on the playground for a game of basketball, volleyball, or kickball after school. Bring in exercise videos and do yoga, pilates, or kickboxing after school.



For more information on employee wellness programs, check out:

School Employee Wellness: A Guide for Protecting the Assets of Our Nation's Schools
www.schoolempwell.org

Wellness Councils of America www.welcoa.org

CanDo – Coalition for Activity and Nutrition to Defeat Obesity
Poudre Valley Hospital Foundation
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www.CanDoOnline.org

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