

# Wellness works

## OEA Choice Trust has become the go-to source for employee wellness in schools

**H**ealthier employees. More successful students. Flourishing communities.

Believe it or not, a little school employee wellness goes a long way in achieving all three of these. And while wellness might seem like a simple concept — and it is, really — sometimes it takes a little helping hand to get it off the ground.

In Oregon, that helping hand is OEA Choice Trust, an organization inspiring schools to create healthy workplaces for all staff, which also positively influences the wellbeing of students.

“OEA Choice Trust has recognized that public school employee health is essential to the success of education,” said Cheri Higgins, a health teacher at Talmadge Middle School in Independence and the current chair of the OEA Choice Trust Board of Trustees. “When employees are healthier and feel valued, it can lead to lower substitute costs/absenteeism, improved morale and ultimately to improved student health and academic success.”

The Trust helps school districts, education service districts and community colleges all over Oregon launch employee wellness programs. It recently sharpened its focus, uniting everything that it does under a lofty new vision:

“All Oregon public school employees are healthy, resilient and engaged as champions for healthy school environments and vital communities. As a result, they are fulfilled in their work, model health for students and are better equipped to foster student success.”

The primary way that OEA Choice Trust



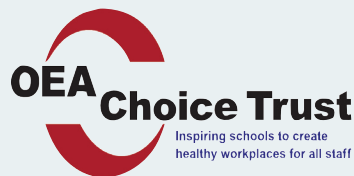
strives toward this vision is through its employee wellness grant program. As of 2013, the Trust had awarded more than \$1.6 million to 34 Oregon public school employee groups to start wellness programs, an effort that has touched more than 18,000 lives. The grants, usually lasting three to five years, have been used to fund everything from employee health assessments and fitness classes in yoga, Zumba and karate to converting an extra classroom

into a gym. Culture changes such as offering healthy snacks and beverages during staff meetings, improving access to clean drinking water and encouraging walking meetings have also resulted from the grants. Some grantees have also taken

steps to add staff wellness to their school wellness policy.

“OEA Choice Trust helps school employees create healthy workplaces that support their total health,” Higgins said. “It empowers school districts, ESDs and community colleges to design customizable employee wellness programs that really work.”

The Trust has also positioned itself as the go-to source for expertise, best practices and a long list of other resources that school employees all over Oregon can tap into for anything related to wellness. That includes OEA Choice Trust’s free Blueprint for School Employee Wellness, a comprehensive, easy-to-use guide for launching a successful employee wellness program, strategies based on worksite wellness research or even simple advice





on how to kick up wellness efforts without spending a penny. (A few examples: Make staff members schedule — and take — their breaks; hold walking meetings instead of sitting ones; and make sure employees have access to clean, free drinking water.)

So, why does OEA Choice Trust do it? Simple. Wellness works.

Not only do wellness programs help employees live healthier lives, but research has also shown that healthy workplaces help school employees manage stress, stay energized and be more focused in their work. The results include better educational outcomes for students, fewer sick days for employees and role models who set a tone of wellness for entire communities.

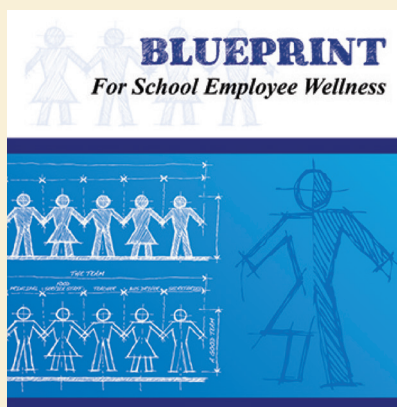
“OEA Choice Trust is leading the way to create healthy school environments for all students and educators across Oregon,” said Hanna Vaandering, president of the Oregon Education Association and an OEA Choice Trust board member. “The partnership we have built with OEA Choice Trust has truly made a difference in the lives of our students and the 42,000 OEA member educators in Oregon.”

To find out more about OEA Choice Trust, visit [www.oeachoice.com](http://www.oeachoice.com). ■

## Tools to get worksite wellness underway

The employee wellness grant program that OEA Choice Trust offers to K-12 school districts, education service districts and community colleges across Oregon may be the largest tool that the Trust brings to bear for wellness, but it's certainly not the only one.

In addition to its grant program, OEA Choice Trust also offers a wealth of expertise and experience to help schools create wellness programs to support employees. Two of the Trust's offerings in particular can help make employee wellness a reality no matter the educational setting.



▪ **OEA Choice Trust Blueprint for School Employee Wellness** — The idea of employee wellness is an appealing one, but without a guide — or even a place to start — the concept can be daunting. OEA Choice Trust's *Blueprint for School Employee Wellness* has been designed to make it easy to get started,

to achieve real results and to make a meaningful difference. Available at [www.oeachoice.com](http://www.oeachoice.com), the *Blueprint for School Employee Wellness* lays out six important steps for creating a successful employee wellness program, steps that can help start a new program from scratch or tighten up an existing one that may just need a little more attention to achieve real success.

▪ **The 2015 Oregon School Employee Wellness Conference** — Now in its fourth year, the Oregon School Employee Wellness Conference aims to engage school employees in creating healthier school environments that support the physical, social and emotional health and well-being of staff and students. Held this year from March 22-24 at The Riverhouse Hotel & Convention Center in Bend, the conference is focused on three themes: building awareness and skills to improve health; implementing school-wide approaches to create a healthy environment for staff and students; and developing community partnerships to leverage resources and achieve shared wellness goals. This year's conference also offers networking opportunities, the chance to both relax and be active in the natural beauty of Central Oregon and a keynote presentation from motivational speaker Dave Weber. Registration is free, and more information is available at [www.oeachoice.com/news-events](http://www.oeachoice.com/news-events).

### Oregon School Employee Wellness Conference The Power of US!

The Riverhouse  
Bend, OR

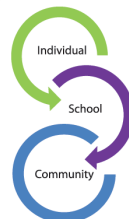
Save The Date:  
March 22-24, 2015

Contact Person: Inge Aldersebaes, OEA Choice Trust  
800-452-0914, Ext 101 ~ email: [Inge@oeachoice.com](mailto:Inge@oeachoice.com)

- Build personal skills to rejuvenate your health
- Bring a school team to learn how to create a culture of wellness
- Access state and national resources to support school employee wellness
- Learn how healthy school employees leads to greater student success

Sponsored By:

OEA Choice Trust, Moda, Oregon Public Health, OEA/NEA, COSA, OEBB, Oregon ASCD, OSBA, ODE Child Nutrition, Kaiser Permanente NW, Crook County Public Health



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