

Bandon School District

Small, Coastal District Fosters Sense of Family through School Employee Wellness Program

Background

Bandon School District (BSD) is a small, rural district located on the southern Oregon coast in Coos County. Bandon's population is just over 3,000, and in addition to its beautiful location, the area is famous for world-class golf, artisan cheese and cranberries. Though a vacation destination, Coos County is ranked 33 out of 36 in Oregon's 2017 county health factors rankings, which are based on weighted scores for health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors and the physical environment¹. The district is made up of one elementary school, one middle school, one high school and the district office, and it employs 105 staff members. Out of the approximately 743 students, 60% qualify for free and reduced meals. The district serves a population of students who are approximately 75% white, 12% Hispanic, 10% multiracial and 3% representing other ethnicities.

Oregon's coastal communities are tight-knit, and neighboring towns often share resources. So in 2012, when Bandon's superintendent learned of the OEA Choice Trust-funded school employee wellness programs at South Coast Education Service District and Port Orford-Langlois School District, she was impressed and eager to learn more about how these neighbors made it happen. When a nutrition services employee returned from the annual Oregon School Employee Wellness Conference and shared that she was "amazed" and inspired by the conference, the superintendent knew it was time to bring school employee wellness to Bandon.

¹ Givens, Marjory, et al. "2017 County Health Rankings: Oregon." County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2017, www.countyhealthrankings.org/sites/default/files/state/downloads/CHR2017_OR.pdf.

The Challenge

Bandon School District was experiencing a decline in enrollment and resources. The Bandon School Board and leadership valued district staff and was eager to find a way to give back and express their gratitude. They believed a good way to do this was to establish a school employee wellness program for all staff. Being in a remote location and having a staff with diverse needs, interests and availability, it was apparent that a school employee wellness program would need to find creative ways to offer something for everyone.

What They Did

After gaining board support, the superintendent enlisted the help of the administrative secretary. They knew a critical first step was to survey the staff to learn their needs and interests. With survey results in hand, BSD formed a school employee wellness committee and applied for an OEA Choice Trust School Employee Wellness grant.

Initial survey results indicated that staff was interested in an on-site wellness center and in walking challenges. District leadership identified a space, a small building that once housed kindergarten, and dedicated this unused space to staff wellness use. With their grant funds, the committee transformed the old kindergarten rooms into a beautiful wellness center. They created waivers for staff to complete prior to using the facility and provided orientations so that staff knew how to use the center safely. The committee organized a walking program to engage the employees who expressed interest in walking challenges and offered health risk screenings with their insurance carrier as an awareness and educational tool.

The first year gave the program a solid foundation, and with data from an annual staff survey, BSD's program continued to grow. To add onto their existing offerings, the committee added fitness classes, which would be led by instructors from the community, a variety of well-being challenges and golf lessons. In the program's third year, it expanded to include retirees who remained on the district's health plan, and school employee spouses/partners were permitted to use the wellness center as long as they were accompanying the district employee. These innovations engaged a broader group of the employee population and encouraged retirees to remain involved in the life of the district.

During the program's evolution, it saw significant changes in leadership. After its second year, the superintendent who started the program retired, and a new superintendent came to Bandon. The program already enjoyed immense support from the school board and was part of the district culture. The new superintendent saw its value from the start. He not only championed the program, he also actively participated on the wellness committee. This superintendent change meant that the administrative secretary needed a new co-wellness coordinator. A newly retired teacher stepped in, and the pair worked well together for the next two years. Now that both coordinators have retired, the program is successfully navigating yet another leadership change as a third grade teacher has stepped into the role. Even though the former coordinators are retired, they remain wellness committee members and serve as mentors for the new coordinator.

Outcomes / Impact

Through the physical health opportunities, variety of wellness challenges and social supports, the program has successfully engaged all employees. In the fourth year, 100% of employees participated in at least one wellness program activity. It was reported that "the (fitness) classes are so popular that they are sometimes crowded!" The wellness center expanded to include a quiet space for relaxing with massage chairs. BSD is especially proud of the engagement they have had with staff from the Transportation Department. One bus driver shared that since the program began, "Transportation staff has been drinking water more than before and participate in walking challenges." Through the committee's hard work, all segments of the employee population have benefited from the program.

BSD's employee wellness program's impact has been both broad and deep. Wellness and self-care have become part of the culture. A wellness committee member reflected, "There is good interaction between schools and departments now

and good participation on the committee. The program brings staff together in a different way." The program has built camaraderie amongst school employees and strengthened professional and personal relationships as a result. A board member remarked, "The program has strengthened the fabric of the school district...and students see their teachers in a different way."

Continuation / Sustainability

The Bandon School Board has championed the employee wellness program from the outset, and in 2016, the board approved an update to the district wellness policy to include school employee wellness. The board agreed to fund the program for the year following the conclusion of the grant with plans to revisit continued funding annually. There is a dedicated wellness committee, with representation from all buildings and employee classifications. The superintendent remains an active member of the wellness committee, and he sees the program as a good benefit to school employees as well as a recruitment tool. An introduction to the wellness program and a tour of the wellness center are part of new employee orientation; it is a point of pride for BSD.

Looking ahead, BSD plans to integrate additional social and emotional supports for staff. Leadership understands that to be a trauma-informed and community-centered district, staff well-being is critical. A mentorship system is under development, and staff are encouraged to break out of isolation to share with and support one another. As the superintendent stated, "Once you're part of the Bandon family, we're going to take care of you." BSD's school employee wellness program is helping to do just that.

About Us

The OEA Choice Trust is the only organization solely dedicated to workplace wellness for all Oregon public school employees. We offer free expertise; best practices and proven strategies based on national worksite wellness research and our own experience across Oregon; and grant funding to help schools create employee wellness programs that support their employees' specific goals. Together with teachers, administrators and school staff, we are building a culture of wellness in Oregon schools. Please join us.

Our Vision and Mission

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. We provide expertise and resources to help Oregon public school employees create comprehensive and flexible wellness programs to build a culture of wellness that becomes the norm in school workplaces. We prioritize quality service and partnerships that support a journey to wellness.