

Corvallis School District

Successful Student Wellness Focus Leads to Adoption of Employee Staff Wellness Program

Background

The Corvallis School District is located in Corvallis, a city in central western Oregon, and home to Oregon State University. The district serves a population of 6,600 students, in fourteen schools, who are approximately 69% white, 22% Hispanic, and 9% representing other ethnicities. Approximately 33% of the students are economically disadvantaged. Corvallis School District staff is comprised of 368 certified teachers and counselors, 343 classified employees, and 48 administrators and supervisors for a total staff count of 759.

Corvallis School District has had a robust student wellness focus since 2006 with the creation of the district wellness team to implement the district's wellness policy and to serve as a resource to schools as they implement their own wellness initiatives. Corvallis schools have encouraged healthy lifestyles through walking trails and running paths for on-site use during recess and lunch, regular Walk/Bike to School Day events, tasting tables to encourage children to try new, locally grown fruits and vegetables, and school gardens to teach students how to grow and enjoy fresh produce. As a result, the district is recognized in the state for its commitment to student wellness and healthy schools. Between 2008-2015, five schools received the Oregon Department of Education's Wellness Award.

The Challenge

The district wellness coordinator, who is also a parent of children in the district, realized that within their current student wellness programming they were primarily focused on students. She felt

tremendous gratitude to the school district staff as her children were completing their K-12 educations. She realized that school staff often put the needs of their students ahead of their personal health and wellness, recognizing that "staff members are selfless, and we need to plan and provide opportunities for staff wellness."

What They Did

The district wellness team met to establish support to expand their wellness efforts to include school employees. Corvallis School District believed that a healthy staff can better teach and meet the needs of their students. They understood the synergy between staff and student health and knew that when staff members modeled healthy behaviors for their students, their students' health and performance would improve as well. The district's leadership was on board to support the expanded wellness focus to include staff, and a subcommittee of the wellness team was established to focus on school employee wellness. This subcommittee, called the Core Team, was comprised of wellness champions from every building in the district, and they met regularly to assess, implement, and evaluate staff wellness initiatives.

To propel their efforts, Corvallis School District applied for an OEA Choice Trust School Employee Wellness grant to build a robust and sustainable plan to promote staff wellness for all district employees. The district partnered with Corvallis Public School Foundation to blend funds to create a 10-hour a week coordinator position for this initiative. With a dedicated coordinator and Core Team in place, Corvallis' school employee wellness program was ready to launch.

The coordinator and Core Team carefully planned and implemented the program. Their first step was to survey the needs and interests of staff members, and they continued to use surveys to assess and evaluate their efforts throughout the grant program. Using survey data, the team launched district-wide challenges, supported activities, and encouraged worksite changes to support the health and well-being of district staff members. Some of their program offerings included wellness clinics, virtual walking challenges, fitness opportunities, annual staff wellness rally to kick off the school year, fresh fruit delivery to staff rooms, mindfulness trainings, and water “hydration station” installation.

Outcomes / Impact

The success of the program grew each year with increased staff participation in wellness activities. Activity sign in sheets demonstrated that at least 50% of district employees were participating in every wellness program activity. Thirty percent of staff participated in their fall 2015 survey, and from that survey, the team learned that, as a result of the program, 51% were eating healthier, 62% increased their daily physical activity, 58% increased their water intake and 91% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “overall, my building is a healthy, positive place to work and learn.” In addition to survey data, the Core Team collected anecdotal reports of staff practicing wellness behaviors with family, friends and colleagues after school and on weekends. There was a noticeable increase in staff engagement, bonding, energy and enthusiasm. Staff from across the entire district were seen participating in the school employee wellness program.

Continuation / Sustainability

Corvallis School District is well known for its focus on student wellness and healthy schools. With the addition of the school employee wellness program, it has shown its commitment to the health and well-being of staff as well as students and the community. The community is very engaged in the school employee wellness program. Since the beginning, the Core Team made a point to engage the community by creating many internal and external partnerships. These partnerships have been mutually beneficial and have continued, helping to sustain Corvallis’ school employee wellness efforts. The Staff Wellness Coordinator and Wellness Champions continue to strengthen these partnerships, advocate for district wellness initiatives, and sustain the program’s momentum.

Corvallis School District administration supports employee wellness by promoting wellness as a district-wide priority. As a result of the program, school employee wellness was included in the district wellness policy. In February 2016, the local

wellness program policy was re-adopted to include, “The district encourages school staff to pursue and maintain a healthy lifestyle that contributes to individual improved health, improved morale, and a greater personal commitment to the school’s overall wellness program. The district will work with community partners to identify programs, services and resources to enrich district-wide wellness.” This policy inclusion demonstrates that staff wellness has been successfully integrated into existing school programs, practices, and policies to create a culture of health in Corvallis School District.

Corvallis School District completed their funding with the OEA Choice Trust School Employee Wellness grant program in February 2016. However, with strong community partnerships, a dedicated Core Team, and powerful support at the district level, Corvallis School District’s school employee wellness program will be making a difference in the lives of district staff members and students for years to come.

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.