



Dallas School District

Planning for Sustainability

Background

Dallas, Oregon is located in the mid-Willamette Valley, just 15 miles west of Salem. The Dallas School District is made up of seven schools, and the district employs 377 staff members, who serve over 3,200 students in Kindergarten through grade 12. The student population is 81% white, 9% Hispanic, and 11% representing other ethnicities. Thirty-nine percent of students qualify for free or reduced-priced meals.

The Challenge

Dallas School District adopted a federally required local wellness policy in 2006. This policy caused a renewed interest in student wellness and was dedicated to physical activity and healthy eating. The policy necessitated the formation of a wellness committee to ensure the integrity of the policy and lead the district's wellness efforts. The policy brought school health and wellness forward as a priority, however the focus was solely on students.

The local education association president learned about the OEA Choice Trust School Employee Wellness Program grant opportunity and encouraged the district to apply. The district's wellness committee chair, an elementary principal, shared the grant opportunity with the committee. This opportunity sparked a renewed interest in the district's wellness efforts and revealed another vital aspect of school wellness: the health and well-being of school employees.

What They Did

Dallas School District applied for a grant from OEA Choice Trust and was awarded funding in 2013.

The existing district wellness committee brought on new members to represent all schools and departments, as well as classified staff to strengthen their program efforts. The committee's role was to support, encourage and provide resources for all of the district's health and wellness activities.

In the beginning, staff understood "wellness" to mean diet and exercise. The committee worked to educate staff to think differently about their habits and to make small, healthier choices. They intentionally simplified their health and wellness approach by encouraging participants to focus on improving work and personal stress levels, presenting a more holistic interpretation of "wellness." The wellness committee engaged their colleagues in a variety of ways. They provided annual biometric screenings as a personal health awareness tool and a way to identify staff needs. The screenings helped shift the perception of the wellness program as a district-driven initiative to an outlet for self and collective care. To further personalize the program, the committee used annual surveys to guide their planning. The rich survey data provided by staff members included positive results, which were used to communicate program success to district and building leadership, building support for sustainability.

Lessons learned in the first year included sharing leadership and responsibility for implementing the program with district and school health and wellness champions so that the entire program wasn't solely the committee's responsibility. To do this, they began using wellness challenges to offer more diverse opportunities and be more inclusive, which resulted in a significant increase in staff participation. The wellness challenges focused on

participation and camaraderie rather than winning. These challenges were a resounding success for the program and a way for staff to participate on their own time, providing everyone an opportunity to win small prizes. Another valuable change they made was to begin offering mini grants to tailor wellness opportunities at the building level. The cumulative result was a more staff-driven, district-supported program.

Under the wellness committee chair's leadership, Dallas School District began considering sustainability during their school employee wellness program's second year. He received guidance and support from OEA Choice Trust and was introduced to the Total Worker Health model and SAIF Corporation. The wellness committee chair was also chair of the district's safety committee, so he appreciated the connection and seized the opportunity to integrate safety and health. He began including wellness as a standing agenda item at safety committee meetings and included wellness representatives on the safety committee. These new additions to the district's safety work brought another layer of support to school employee wellness efforts, as the wellness committee continued to meet monthly with a focus on staff wellness. There is a connection between the safety and wellness committees; they cross-promote and share a line item in the district budget. The superintendent created a safety statement, which includes, "Dallas School District is committed to creating a workplace that is safe, healthy, and injury free. Our employees are our most valuable assets, and their safety and health is our first priority."

Outcomes / Impact

Dallas' school employee wellness program has had significant results. Its 2015-16 annual survey had a response rate of 57%. Participants reported:

- 80% of staff participated in at least one wellness program activity
- 70% satisfaction with the employee wellness program
- 50% eat healthier more days of the week
- 57% are more physically active
- 26% experienced better stress-coping abilities
- 14% experienced reduction in stress levels
- 15% experienced improved sleep
- 23% experienced more energy to get things done at work
- 15% experienced more energy for family, friends, and home life
- 27% experienced improved work/life balance
- 27% experienced increased sense of belonging and fun
- 43% reported improved health as a result of the program

Continuation / Sustainability

Dallas School District's leadership, including the superintendent, school board, and education association are engaged in the school employee wellness program and provide steady support. This is demonstrated by allocation of time during contract hours for wellness activities. One of the most visible ways that leadership provides support is by dedicating time for wellness activities during district-wide professional development time. Some examples include wellness speakers, biometric screenings, flu shots, and comedy for stress relief. Additionally, the wellness committee chair is a building administrator who leads the safety committee. His passion for school employee wellness and integration of wellness into the safety committee's work ensures that school employee wellness remains a focus.

Dallas' school employee wellness program has seen a cultural shift. What began as a nudge from the education association president transformed into a meaningful way for school employees to engage with each other with the shared goal of leading healthier lives. The program continues to grow and deepen its influence. The school employee wellness program is shared with new employees during orientation, and family members are encouraged to participate in wellness activities with their spouses. Dallas School District is working with Blue Zones Project Oregon to complete a worksite wellness pledge to take employee wellness to the next level and sustain their health and wellness efforts 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.