

Gladstone School District

School Employee Wellness is Critical to Create an Environment for Success and Learning

Background

Gladstone, a community of 12,000 people is located fifteen minutes south of downtown Portland. Many families choose to live in Gladstone because of the friendly small town atmosphere and the strong schools. The Gladstone School District consists of four schools with 2,145 students in grades K – 12 and 194 staff members. Approximately 49% of the students are economically disadvantaged, 74% white, 15% Hispanic, and 11% representing other ethnicities. The Gladstone School District holds family and community at the heart of its decision-making for the students attending its schools.

Wellness matters in the Gladstone School District “because the health of our teachers and staff is essential to our mission. Good health allows our employees to be effective instructors and positive role models. Our families and community also look to us to support a culture of wellness and leading by example is one of the best ways to do that.”

Gladstone School District is in its fourth year of the OEA Choice Trust School Employee Wellness Grant Program. The Director of Student & Family Supports is responsible for the health and well-being of the entire school community, including staff, accomplished through school and community partnerships. As part of his responsibilities, he administers this program for the district. The school administrators are the building champions and in charge of wellness within their schools.

The Challenge

Gladstone School District prides itself on its innovative approach to education. Several years ago the district committed to increasing student

success and in turn placed more demands on the teaching and support staff. An initiative between Gladstone schools and its partners, including families, benefactors, social service agencies, businesses, the faith community, volunteers, and community members, began by building understanding, trust, and collaboration. This initiative coincided a reduction in funding from the State of Oregon. Through this challenging financial situation, Gladstone School District created an environment and culture for success and learning.

The teaching profession is normally very challenging due to many factors including the daily social interactions, challenges of broad differentiated instruction, and realities of large class sizes. Students have diverse needs and learning styles; many come to school not ready to learn due to various social, emotional, behavior and home difficulties. The district recognized that their teachers and staff needed help to manage stress and lead healthy lives so that they could fill their classrooms with energy, patience and empathy.

What They Did

The district had started many different wellness efforts, but none of them were sustained. The OEA Choice Trust grant funding was used to create a comprehensive program, not an activity driven program, which was different from previous attempts to change culture and create healthier environments. The overarching goal was to create “a school community culture of wellness through a healthy, safe and respectful environment for growing great people.”

With the support of OEA Choice Trust, the district put together a survey to look at staff member’s job

satisfaction. The Director of Student & Family Supports realized that working in education is one of the most challenging careers in terms of demand levels on personal engagement and professional performance. The district believed that if healthy conditions were put in place for their staff that they would enjoy their work more. The survey initially explored what would make a staff member's work life better and healthier. The survey results have been a data-driven approach to guide the employee wellness programming.

Building administrators were urged to use the funding "as a catalyst to take care of their staff." Staff are given permission by building administrators to take care of themselves and this goes a long way to reduce stress levels and increase engagement. By taking care of themselves, staff are able to take care of the students. The superintendent challenges the building administrators with "healthy teachers equal healthy classrooms."

Outcomes / Impact

The leadership for the wellness initiative comes from the district office, and building administrators lead the program within their school. This model, although untraditional in employee wellness program implementation, is successful. Gladstone School District staff recognize there are resources that can be used creatively by the district and building administrators to create an environment of success and learning. By taking care of themselves and each other, they are changing the culture and creating healthier environments where everyone thrives. The funding has been used to stimulate culture change rather than create activities and purchase disposable materials.

Every school and the district office is involved in the employee wellness program. Each school is responsive to their staff and tailors the program to their needs. The employee survey is administered each year and staff report a decrease in absenteeism, healthier eating habits, and increased employee engagement. The survey is modified based on previous learnings and focuses on what the district is trying to improve in its culture and to measure changes in attitudes and behaviors.

Responding to the 2015 survey, participants reported the following health improvements:

- Losing weight – 33%,
- Healthier eating habits – 69%,
- Being more physically active – 51%,
- A reduced stress level – 28%, and
- Enjoy coming to work more – 11%.
- Health has improved as a result of the employee wellness program – 34%
- Lowered blood pressure – 9%
- Improved sleep – 28%

Continuation / Sustainability

Building on the program's early successes and employee satisfaction, 75% of survey respondents were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the wellness program in their school, Gladstone School District will continue to emphasize employee wellness.

Specifically, to achieve their employee wellness goals and improve results, they plan to:

- Convene staff wellness leaders monthly from across the district for shared planning, activities, and marketing opportunities,
- Increase communications about available wellness activities in each school,
- Promote additional, diversified activities to each school, and
- Link reductions in staff stress to increased professional skill for relational teaching with trauma impacted students.

Gladstone School District plans to sustain and continue the employee wellness program through pursuing additional grant funding. They are also strategizing how to involve their school board through a review of the school wellness policy to include school employee wellness and presenting program successes.

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.