



Port Orford-Langlois School District

Building a Foundation for Wellness

Background

The Port Orford-Langlois School District is a small, rural district on the southern Oregon coast. Forty-two employees serve the approximately 200 K-12 students in its two schools. Sixty-six percent of the student population qualifies for free or reduced meals, 82% of the students are white, 7% Hispanic, and 11% represent other ethnicities.

Port Orford-Langlois School District is “committed to establishing and maintaining a safe and nondiscriminatory educational environment.” The district’s mission is to “provide curriculum and programs for ALL students to enable them to be proficient and to allow them to excel as ethical, responsible, and successful members of a global society.”

The Challenge

Port Orford-Langlois School District faced decreased student enrollment and reductions in staff. Employee health and wellness had not been a priority. The administrative team recognized that a wellness program for staff was an opportunity to improve morale and teamwork, decrease absenteeism, and improve overall health. The vision was to engage school employees in personal wellness and healthy lifestyles. Employees were surveyed to gauge interests, and they indicated the program should focus on making healthier food choices and increasing daily movement. The program’s goal became “to reduce heart disease risk factors of stress, inactivity, and poor food choices to promote a culture of health and wellness.”

This isolated school district did not have the capacity to initiate and maintain a school employee

wellness program on their own. The closest fitness center was 27 miles away, in Bandon, Oregon, and no local resources were available to support the effort. This lack of access to resources inspired district leadership to apply for an OEA Choice Trust School Employee Wellness Program grant.

What They Did

Upon obtaining a grant from OEA Choice Trust, Port Orford-Langlois formed a wellness committee. In addition to district employees, the committee invited a local fitness professional to serve on the committee. This community partner soon became a pivotal committee member in engaging the district’s employees, and she became the school employee wellness program’s coordinator in the program’s second year. The wellness coordinator found success in starting small. She reached out to staff through many methods, including personal phone calls, emails, and stopping by classrooms to engage and encourage them in their personal wellness goals. This approach built trusting relationships and became the foundation of Port Orford-Langlois’ robust school employee wellness program.

Strong administrative support and a passion for wellness led to the creation of a fully-equipped gym for staff to be physically active within both schools. The wellness committee provided an orientation to the gym and its equipment and required individuals to sign waivers prior to using the fitness center to ensure safe gym use. Staff were encouraged to use the gym before, after, and during the school day when they had non-student time. Family members were permitted to use the gym with their spouses to encourage each other in their healthy habits.

Personal invitations were extended to staff to participate in the district-sponsored annual health screenings, and school administrators covered classes for teachers so they could participate in the screenings. As the staff members completed their health screenings, they were given a survey to complete. This annual survey provided the wellness committee with data to help them understand the staff's needs and interests, capture staff satisfaction with the program, and evaluate the program's effectiveness. The approach led to an 88% participation rate. Administrators supported the wellness efforts and brought healthy snacks to staff meetings. Port Orford-Langlois saw a cultural shift and began to identify the individual wellness resources within the community. For example, employees with farms and gardens brought their produce to share at meetings and in staff break rooms.

To further engage employees, the wellness program offered a variety of opportunities for staff, by organizing workshops and group activities, to work toward personal goals. Small incentives were awarded to individuals who met their individual wellness goals, which increased participation. These opportunities kept staff members engaged and boosted morale.

Outcomes / Impact

At the completion of the grant program in 2016, employees were surveyed about the impact of the program. With a survey completion rate of 80%, respondents reported the following:

- 100% saw their health improve
- 100% believed it helped to create better school morale
- 100% believed that their health and well-being was a priority for the administration
- 100% had more energy at work
- 93% believed the program had a positive impact on student health and wellness

Continuation / Sustainability

To ensure its commitment to school employee wellness, the district updated its local wellness policy to include staff.

The district encourages school staff to pursue a healthy lifestyle that contributes to their improved health status, improved morale and a greater personal commitment to the school's overall wellness program. Many actions and conditions that affect the health of school employees may also influence the health and learning of students. The physical and mental health of

school employees is integral to promoting and protecting the health of students and helps foster their academic success. The district's employee wellness program will promote health and reduce risk behaviors of employees and identify and correct conditions in the workplace that can compromise the health of school employees, reduce their levels of productivity, impede student success and contribute to escalating health-related costs such as absenteeism.

Additionally, Port Orford-Langlois School District has dedicated funding in its budget to sustain key program elements and leadership supports its continuation. Since completing the OEA Choice Trust School Employee Wellness Grant Program, the district has seen a Superintendent change. However, the district culture of wellness, existing leadership support for sustaining the program, and continued dedication of a wellness coordinator has kept the program strong through the transition. Port Orford-Langlois has built a solid foundation for wellness and has put resources in place which will continue to benefit its school employees.

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.