



# Rainier School District

## Synergizing Staff, Student, and Community Wellness

### Background

The Rainier School District lies on the Columbia River in northwest Oregon. This small rural community has been financially impacted by the decline of the timber industry. The 260 acre campus, a former golf course site, includes a district office, one elementary school, one junior/senior high school and a charter school. The 122 school employees of Rainier School District serve 982 students in grades K-12, 54% of whom qualify for free or reduced meals. Approximately 85% of the students are white, 7% Hispanic, and 8% representing other ethnicities.

Rainier School District is a “spirited learning community that is student centered, safe, academically focused, and dedicated to preparing every student for success in the global society in which we live.” The district, in collaboration with the community, identified six priority areas, or “pillars.” One of the six pillars is to have a “safe and healthy environment.” With this vision of having a safe and healthy environment, the district was called to identify the areas in need of improvement and take action.

### The Challenge

Rainier School District has a culture of seeking out resources and being creative to meet the diverse needs of students and the community. Several grant funded initiatives already supported their focus on student health and wellness. When the district faced a budget crisis and was forced to reduce staff and programs, the school board remained committed to student wellness by refusing to make cuts to physical education. The district, through community input and guidance, kept a spotlight on wellness. They focused on their

assets and what they could expand and improve upon. The student health and wellness initiatives were an identified asset. However, after completing a comprehensive school health assessment, their leadership recognized that to establish a comprehensive approach to health and wellness, a school employee wellness component was needed.

### What They Did

The School Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) was revitalized and became the clearinghouse for all district wellness programs and activities. The committee’s role was to facilitate staff engagement, community involvement, and grant writing efforts. The SHAC recruited school building level champions to attend their meetings during the school day, providing 30 minutes of release time to support the effort. Staff members who were already active and passionate about health and wellness became their school’s champion. The district also encouraged administrative support and bolstered community partnerships with representation on the SHAC at meetings and through involvement in the health and wellness programs and activities.

When Rainier School District’s SHAC learned of the OEA Choice Trust School Employee Wellness Grant Program, they submitted an application for funding to springboard their employee wellness efforts. They chose to focus on increasing physical activity, providing staff with a flu shot clinic, and implementing a smoking cessation program.

## Outcomes / Impact

Rainier School District's collaborative efforts have had widespread accomplishments for its staff, students, and community:

- The school district is a destination spot for nutrition, serving over 600 meals each day and maintaining over 67% participation. Students participating in the Discovery Club have the opportunity help Nutrition Services staff prepare and cater healthy food for staff, district, and community meetings.
- The School Based Health Center (SBHC) expanded to provide services, primary and mental health care four days a week. Recognizing the SBHC as a valuable resource not only for students, staff and community members can also access these services. The SBHC is truly community-based, serving as the medical home for many staff, students, and community members.
- The school employee wellness program worked with the local union leadership to clarify policies around smoking breaks to create an environment more conducive to smoking cessation. If a staff member wants to use tobacco during the school day, they can only leave campus during their 30-minute lunch break. Additionally, the wellness program offers tobacco cessation resources for staff and is exploring how to offer a support group.
- In 2016, Rainier School District won the Oregon Department of Education's Oregon School Wellness Award.
- At the conclusion of the school employee wellness program's first year, the SHAC conducted a survey, with a response rate of 41%, which revealed:
  - ✓ 77.6% staff participation
  - ✓ 100% staff satisfaction with the program
  - ✓ 97% agreement that the program contributed to improved employee morale
  - ✓ 61% reported that they are eating healthier more days of the week
  - ✓ 58.9% reported being more physically active
  - ✓ 64% reported losing weight
  - ✓ Overall, 86.6% of staff reported that their health improved as a result of the school employee wellness program.

## Continuation / Sustainability

Rainier School District is committed to continuing to make school employee wellness a priority. School employee wellness has been incorporated into the local district wellness policy, and administrators are champions of the program. The superintendent actively participates and promotes the program and regularly includes wellness in professional development time. Rainier School District encourages staff to focus on personal health and wellness.

After one year as an OEA Choice Trust grantee, Rainier's culture of wellness has evolved and continues to grow. School staff who initially resisted the program now participate and appreciate the program's benefits. Colleagues organize their own weekend healthy activities, such as hiking, biking, and running. The school employee wellness program has a solid foundation and has become an important part of creating a "safe and healthy environment."

### 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.