

Springfield Public Schools

Appreciation of Staff Through a School Employee Wellness Program

Background

Springfield, Oregon is located in Southern Willamette Valley and the second most populous city in the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area. Springfield Public Schools is the twelfth largest school district in Oregon with approximately 10,800 students, twenty-one schools, and 1,300 employees. The district serves a population of students who are approximately 68% white, 21% Hispanic, 11% representing other ethnicities. Approximately 63% of the students are economically disadvantaged. The vision is *“Every Student a Graduate Prepared for a Bright and Successful Future.”*

Springfield Public Schools applied for an OEA Choice Trust school employee wellness grant to promote wellness among employees through education and activities aimed at improving health, increasing feelings of well-being, and controlling medical costs.

The local wellness policy, adopted in 2010, recognizes the importance of school employee wellness programs, *“Because school staff and support personnel serve as role models, the school district should encourage activities and create programs that support healthy lifestyles for all school district employees.”*

Springfield Public Schools completed their OEA Choice Trust grant funded programming in 2013.

The Challenge

Prior to receiving grant funding from OEA Choice Trust, Springfield Public Schools was experiencing low morale due to budget cuts, decreases in employee compensation, and a reduction in staffing. The district was forced to cut some health

benefits and knew the best way to contain rising insurance costs was through preventative health and wellness.

The district envisioned the school employee wellness program as a benefit and a way to compensate and appreciate their dedicated staff during difficult budget years. Following OEA Choice Trust’s Blueprint for School Employee Wellness, they initiated their program. A leader at the district level personally recruited wellness leaders from each school through phone calls and personal visits. A robust employee wellness committee was formed including representation of both certified and classified staff.

What They Did

The employee wellness committee met and brainstormed ideas to begin the program. They decided to sponsor a *Know Your Numbers* health screening and had 400 available spots. Surprisingly, these filled up within two days, and 398 employees completed the health screening. This initial activity and overwhelming response created awareness for the program. The compiled health screening results were used to tailor wellness activities for desired health behavior changes. The entire employee population, not only those who completed the health screening, were encouraged to participate in wellness program activities.

Participation in OEA Choice Trust’s Journey to Wellness annual grantee meeting provided additional resources and networking with other school districts who were trying to improve staff health and wellness. The employee wellness program was expanded in the second year to encourage all 1,300 staff to be active and incorporate regular physical activity into their lives.

A partnership with Willamalane Parks and Recreation District was developed to provide annual memberships to all employees, which saw 485 district employees take part and an overall average of 2,800 staff visits per month. They also designed activities to help employees manage their stress levels and to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Through collaboration with their health insurance carrier, local parks and recreation department, and the worker's compensation carrier, successful wellness and safety programs were created. The district's health insurance company sponsored a *Healthy Life Challenge*, and Springfield Public Schools competed with a neighboring school district. The program was publicized through local media and the participation level was 55%. The wellness committee also promoted school gardens and worked on healthy classroom snack guidelines. The safety committee reviewed accident data and initiated an annual safety seminar for all custodial, maintenance and summer crew staff. They also developed an active return to work program.

Outcomes / Impact

Springfield Public Schools has healthier employees, as demonstrated by 23% lower healthcare costs. Additionally, there has been a significant reduction in workers' compensation claims, rating from 1.20 to 0.90 since the beginning of the employee wellness program.

Since the inception of the wellness program, employee health is talked about openly and more often. Staff members talk about fitness classes and healthy eating. Many bring their exercise clothes to work, have walking groups after school, or play pickleball between bus routes. Several schools have organized wellness fairs. The activities are employee led and grow organically without formal wellness program initiation. Staff are striving to find ways to become active and healthy. This shift in culture is far-reaching and impacts both students and families.

The school employee wellness program has created a sustained culture of wellness and improved morale through fitness, wellness activities, and continued partnerships. One indication of a successful program is that the people impacted by the program would miss it if it went away, and the Springfield Public Schools staff state they *"would be really disappointed"* if the school employee wellness program ended.

Continuation / Sustainability

The Springfield Public Schools employee wellness program adapts and is flexible, thus creating an environment where there is something for everyone. Teachers have asked for, and the district is exploring, opportunities for health-related content on professional development days.

The ongoing community partnerships are essential to success. Safe Routes to School has become a new partner, largely because of the culture of wellness in the district. A Safe Routes to School coordinator works at the district to encourage and implement walking and biking to school for students, staff and families.

The employee wellness committee and the district wellness committee have merged and are looking at policy and creating programs around both staff and student nutrition and wellness. By having an active committee composed of staff, community partners, parents, and administration, a level of awareness and importance around wellness is maintained. This helps sustain momentum for the employee wellness program.

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.