A school staff wellness program is an organized program for all employees designed to enrich their physical, mental, emotional, and occupational well-being. The goal is to make the work environment supportive of positive health behaviors and thereby help prevent chronic diseases and promote improved well-being for all employees. In order to earn points for this action, a district or school must document that it has an established comprehensive school staff wellness program by providing a copy of the program plan for the current school year and evidence that it has been implemented.

Why is it important?
Healthy employees are a critical component of a thriving school. A healthy workplace leads to employees who are more satisfied with their jobs and are able to be higher performing. They are absent fewer days and more likely to stay in their positions. Healthy employees provide the continuity and stability that is so essential for educational success. Research shows employee health and wellness programs contribute to workplace excellence and job satisfaction in variety of ways:

Wellness programs improve employee performance: As part of employee compensation and the benefits package, supportive health and wellness programs can provide support and help with recruitment and retention in the schools. Indeed, all employees can benefit from workplace wellness programs. Research shows that by creating a culture of health and increasing healthy behaviors—from being more physically active to eating healthier foods—wellness programs can increase employees' ability to focus, reduce absenteeism, improve employee morale, and combat chronic diseases. Beyond the health benefits of more exercise and healthier foods, workforce wellness programs can help combat stress. School districts that have successfully implemented workforce programs focusing on exercise, stress management and nutrition report increases in employee morale, improved employee health behaviors and higher levels of general well-being among employees.

Wellness programs reduce organizational costs: The adoption of healthy behaviors has been shown to reduce the risks of developing disabling or life threatening diseases and their associated costs. Moreover, by reducing rates of workplace injuries, wellness programs also reduce worker's compensation claims. Wellness programs have been shown to reduce employee medical costs which can allow for sustainable health care coverage.

Wellness programs help create good places to work: By making the healthy choice the easy choice, wellness programs can create a culture of health and deliver a wide range of benefits to employees including:

- A safer, more supportive work environment,
- Improved health, increased well-being, self-image, and self-esteem,
- Improved coping skills with stress or other factors affecting health,
- Reduced out-of-pocket expenses (i.e., reduced premiums, deductibles and co-payments) for physician office visits, medications, procedures or hospitalizations related to acute or chronic illness, and
- Improved job satisfaction.

Furthermore, teachers and other school employees are role models for students. School employees who are interested in their own health are more likely to promote healthy behaviors and practices to students, who are then more likely to engage in health-promoting activities themselves.
Who should lead and be involved with this action?

The following four groups are essential for establishing, implementing, and sustaining effective school staff wellness programs:

- School district personnel who implement the wellness programs
- Decision makers who approve policies and provide administrative support
- Employees who will benefit from the wellness programs
- Stakeholders in the community who share the mission of improving the health of all residents such as officials in public health and voluntary agencies, health care providers, and parents.

Timeframe

The amount of time needed to develop and implement a school staff wellness program will vary by district and/or school. Key factors will include whether there is an existing wellness council dedicated to addressing school health issues; how much administrative support, community support, and employee interest already exists; and what resources are available such as facilities, time, and personnel. If the foundations of a program are not already in place, it may make sense to spend an initial school year building the program and plan for the official launch of the program at the start of the following school year. Rolling out the program in the beginning of the school year will allow sufficient time to gain momentum prior to summer break.

Project costs and resource needs

Implementing a school employee wellness program requires a variety of resources, such as qualified personnel to oversee and offer programs, space to conduct programs, equipment and supplies to carry out activities, and information about specific issues. Many resources might already be available in the school district or community. Drawing on employee talents, skills, and expertise has a number of advantages. Employees understand the education environment and the needs of their colleagues. And, as members of the school community, they are likely to be trusted by program participants. The district's health insurance carrier may have significant resources and incentives that could be incorporated into a successful program. Most districts already have partnerships with community agencies and organizations upon which they can build. Potential community partners can include local health department, hospitals, and established health organizations like the American Cancer Society, YMCAs, and local businesses.

There are many potential funding options for a school staff wellness program. A program may charge registration fees to offset some of the costs. A small fee also may reduce attrition. District revenues are another option as savings are accrued by improved health of district staff reduces insurance coverage costs and by reduced teacher and staff absences requiring substitutes. Another option is to seek federal, state, and/or private funding. Some districts obtain state or federal grants that support school employee wellness as part of a larger program. Private funding sources include foundations, corporations, hospitals, voluntary agencies, and community groups. Private sources typically have specific criteria for their funding, such as geographic location, populations targeted, and issues addressed (e.g., education, disease prevention, and health services).

What to do, and how to do it ("How to")

This section provides guidance and recommendations for implementing the action. A community does not need to follow this guidance exactly, as long as it meets the requirements for earning points for this action.

The five components of a comprehensive school staff wellness program:

1. Health Education. Examples include health promotion literature, newsletters, sessions at staff development events, etc.
2. Supportive Social and Physical Environments. Examples include incentives, walking/running groups, exercise or fitness classes, access to facilities (showers, locker rooms, on-site gyms, etc.), bike racks or storage, healthy food service options, etc.
3. Integration of Worksite Program into Organizational Structure. Examples include the existence of formal health and wellness policies, dedicated staff and employees to plan programs, management and supervisors are involved in planning and support implementation, and employee access and program utilization is encouraged.
4. Linkages with Related Programs. Examples include employee assistance, occupational health and safety programs, health benefits or flexible spending accounts, etc.

5. Screening Programs. Examples include blood pressure, diabetes, stress, cholesterol, Health Risk Appraisal, etc.

Setting up a successful school wellness program is more than offering a yoga class after school or healthy snacks in the break room. It requires buy-in from school leadership and careful planning based on local needs and priorities. The good news is that there are a variety of resources available to support the effort. See the Resources section of this action for useful toolkits that can help at each step in the process.

Four overarching strategies that should be kept in mind when establishing a school employee wellness program include:

1. **Integrate into the coordinated school health program.** A coordinated school health program is a model for creating health-promoting school environments for students and their families as well as employees of school systems.

2. **Tailor to the health needs of the participants.** The traditional approach to developing school employee wellness programs has been "cafeteria style" (i.e., offering choices from an array of activities). These activities-centered programs boost morale, develop awareness, and expose employees to opportunities to engage in activities. However, they tend to attract the "worried well" or those who are likely to practice healthy behaviors even if they have no program to engage them. A results-oriented or "population health management" approach to school staff wellness uses annual individual health risk appraisals to provide data as a basis for designing targeted health-promotion interventions. By focusing on identified health risks, it aims to attract people who are most at risk and less likely to participate in health-promotion activities. For example, these programs reward employees for participating in smoking cessation programs and help individuals with high cholesterol to change their diets and increase their physical activity.

3. **Start small and build a foundation.** Existing school staff wellness programs vary in scope and size. Some districts conduct health risk assessments and offer health risk reduction interventions that target identified personal health risks. Others organize activities such as walking programs, health fairs, access to fitness centers, nutrition management, and stress management. The decision to offer these activities is generally based on a survey of potential participants' interests and motivation, the availability of facilities or resources, and the interests and skills of the coordinator and other support staff. Starting small can provide the foundation for evolution to a more ambitious, comprehensive, results-oriented program.

4. **Gather support from a cross section of the school community.** Allies already exist within school systems who realize the importance of promoting the health of school employees. They include health educators; licensed health professionals within the school; mental health professionals within the school such as psychologists, social workers, and counselors; and nutrition services staff. Less obvious allies often can be more powerful in the effort to establish a school staff wellness program. These potential supporters could include the school district's chief financial officer, human resources administrator, risk benefit officer, and employee assistance program manager. Elected officials of the bargaining units for employee groups are also potential supporters.

Outlined below is a suggested process for establishing a school staff wellness program. Some districts may find it necessary to start at Step 1, whereas others may have already completed some of the initial steps.

1. **Obtain Administrative Support**

   The primary mission of any school district is to educate its students to ensure that they achieve academically and are prepared to become productive members of society upon completing their education. Consequently, the first question to address is "How will a school staff wellness program help our district achieve its primary mission?"

   For a school staff wellness program to be successful and sustainable, it needs the support of the superintendent and school board at the district level and the principal and vice principal(s) at the school level. Decision makers in school systems require data to make their decisions about policies and programs. Data such as employee absences and the related costs or surveys of interest can help make the case for a school employee wellness program:
2. **Identify a Leader**

The school employee wellness leader may be an existing employee with a commitment to health such as a health educator, nurse, psychologist, counselor, or other member of the school staff. Similar to school health programs for students, staff wellness programs are sometimes insufficiently developed because a specific employee is not assigned the responsibility of implementing the program, or because program implementation has been added to the responsibilities of a staff member with limited time. Research shows that school employee wellness programs are more likely to be sustained if leaders were paid an additional stipend for the extra responsibilities of implementing the program, or if these responsibilities were incorporated into their job description.

3. **Organize a Committee**

The core of a school staff wellness committee may already be in place. For example, a district or school wellness council, even if it has not focused on school employee wellness could take on this role. If preexisting groups are not interested in expanding their activities, invite them to send a representative to join the school staff wellness committee.

Committee members can be identified in a variety of ways. They may be selected by the person designated to lead the program, a school administrator, or a combination of sources. After initial organization, the committee might be self-perpetuating and become responsible for determining its own membership, or a district might develop policies to specify the process for becoming a committee member. Members of a district or school wellness council or a separate staff wellness program committee need to represent a variety of stakeholders and bring diverse skills and interests to the group. This includes representatives of the people the program will affect; representatives of the other components of a coordinated school health program such as physical education teachers, food service, and maintenance staff; school administrators; and community resource providers.

Select individuals who influence policy and are willing to take responsibility for carrying out tasks. The group should meet regularly to plan, develop, review, and evaluate activities. Primary responsibilities will include:

- Informing school employees about program plans and obtaining feedback
- Sharing concerns and providing positive and negative feedback from the school employees
- Assisting with assessing needs and mapping resources
- Coordinating school employee wellness activities with student health-promotion activities
- Advocating for and participating in activities
- Assisting with setting priorities for program offerings and expenditures
- Ensuring that activities are aligned with the district’s policies and norms

A useful resource to plan and support the work of the group charged with developing and implementing a school staff wellness program is the NC Smart School Worksite Wellness Toolkit Committee Workbook. It is a comprehensive guide for developing a well-organized worksite wellness committee and provides step-by-step instructions for developing and planning a wellness program that supports healthy eating, physical activity, tobacco cessation and stress management. Sample meeting agendas, employee and worksite surveys, informational posters and letters and evaluation surveys are included. [Download here](#).

4. **Gather and Analyze Data**

A needs assessment provides key data to develop support for and plan a program. Data about school employee wellness programs are gathered to:

- Determine baseline health-related costs and risks to justify investment in the program, and to demonstrate progress and cost savings after implementation
- Assess the status of school employee wellness activities
- Identify the interests of school employees

The data collected at the outset will provide a baseline for monitoring, evaluating, and adapting the program over time. Collecting data periodically can help make program changes that address changing employee interests and
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s School Health Index (SHI): A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide is a free resource that can help schools identify the strengths and weaknesses of their health and safety policies and programs and plan for improvement. School officials have reported that, after completing the SHI, sites often decide to start their coordinated school health program activities with a focus on school-site health promotion for employees because they find this component is the least developed, or because they consider a focus on school employee wellness a strategy for generating employee buy-in. See the Sustainable Jersey for School Health Assessment action for more detail.

Using an employee survey to initiate a wellness program can stimulate awareness of and interest in health promotion, give employees a sense of ownership, and ensure that activities are responsive to the needs and concerns of potential participants. An employee survey can identify areas of employee interest, assess health behaviors, and ascertain levels of readiness. A sample survey can be downloaded here. See the toolkits listed in the Resources section of this action for additional examples.

Some districts conduct health screenings for conditions such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and tobacco use to determine the proportion of employees with health risk and then target the most common risks. In all cases, the confidentiality of employee responses must be ensured.

5. Develop a Plan

A well-developed plan provides a blueprint for program activities, develops ownership and investment of stakeholders who participate in the planning process, and demonstrates to the school board, administrators, and taxpayers that the desired outcomes justify the use of resources. A well-written plan spells out clearly why, how, when, and by whom activities will be accomplished. The plan needs to link the employee wellness program to the district’s mission of educating its students and address the health concerns and needs of diverse populations.

Based on the insights garnered through the needs assessment, establish a yearly cycle of activities. Consider organizing activities based on events that occur in the course of the school year, such as returning to school, exam week, preparing for holidays, and getting ready for summer, or revolve them around national health observances. Plan a kickoff event that is easy to implement and that provides school- or district-wide visibility at little or no cost. Examples include a month-long walking program, a presentation on the relationship of nutrition and fitness to stress, or a staff development day that features a health related session.

6. Implement the Plan

An endorsement by the superintendent or other key administrator and bargaining unit leadership is a powerful strategy for promoting participation in the program. Use posters, newsletters, payroll stuffers, e-mail and website postings, announcements at union and employee meetings, and individual contact as strategies to raise awareness. Do not be discouraged. It might take a while for people to show up at events or decide that they want to engage in better health habits. As program participation grows expand the scope of activities and recruit volunteers to assist with future events. The options are limited only by the imagination of team members.

7. Evaluate and Adapt the Program

Evaluation can help to identify needed changes, find out how well objectives are being met, determine the effects of the program, and identify ways to improve it. Evaluation starts when the program is established, with needs assessments and surveys that provide a baseline for measuring progress. This type of evaluation is called "formative evaluation." A sample evaluation from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation can be downloaded here. Other sample evaluations can be found in the various toolkits listed in the Resources section of this action.

Outcome evaluation measures a program’s impact. Employees who change behaviors reduce health risks and have fewer health care needs. Program evaluations can look at behaviors like tobacco use, healthy eating, and physical activity as measures of program effectiveness. Improvements in body composition, blood pressure, blood cholesterol, and blood glucose are just a few of the risk measures that can improve as a result of a school employee wellness
In an environment of tight budgets, any school employee program that can show a positive return on investment will likely be long-lived. Evaluating the financial impact of a school staff wellness program may provide the information administrators need to justify wellness efforts. The best financial outcomes data should be presented in a manner that compares the total costs of the program with the total financial benefits of the program. This is called a cost-to-benefit ratio. Financial benefits are the amount of money saved from reduced health care costs and absenteeism.

1. **Sustain the Program**

School board and administrative support is crucial for the continued development and sustenance of a school staff wellness program. The following strategies can help maintain this support:

- Invite administrators to attend school employee wellness committee meetings
- Develop clear procedures for communication
- Through appropriate channels, request an opportunity to meet with the school board at least once a year
- Make recommendations to the school board about staff wellness policies
- Revise or update policies as the program evolves
- Evaluate the program regularly and keep policymakers informed
- Develop a visual record of the program

The economic, social, and personal benefits of promoting health in the workplace are clear. Health promotion in schools holds the promise of an even greater impact than health promotion at other worksites. School districts are often one of the largest employers in the community and their staff has the potential to affect the academic achievement and well-being even larger numbers of students every day. A school staff wellness program, as an integral and equal component of a coordinated school health program, can be critical to maintaining a healthy, optimistic environment where students and employees thrive. Although implementing a school employee wellness program can be complex and demanding, empirical evidence suggests that the rewards far outweigh the challenges.

**What to submit to earn points for this action**

In order to earn points for this action a district or school must document it has an established comprehensive school staff wellness program by providing a copy of the program plan for the current school year and evidence that it has been implemented. Please submit the following documentation as part of the online certification application in order to verify that the action requirements have been met:

1. **Description of Implementation.** In the text box provided on the submission page for this action, provide an overview of the school staff wellness program including how it was developed, who was involved, what has been accomplished, and the impact it has or will have on the school community.

2. **Upload a copy of the school staff wellness program plan for the current school year.**

3. **Upload information on program components implemented to date in the current school year.** This can include program flyers, website postings, newsletter articles, pictures at events, etc. If possible, please compile all the materials into one PDF file.

Approved actions will be set to expire on August 31 of the year the certification application was submitted. To reapply for this action, documentation must be updated to verify that the program is active in the current school year.

**Important Notes:**

- There is a limit of six uploaded documents per action and individual files must not exceed 20 MB. Excerpts of relevant information from large documents are recommended.

- All action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submissions should not include any information or documents that are not intended for public viewing.
Spotlight: What New Jersey schools are doing

Sustainable Jersey is currently working on identifying schools that have successfully completed this action. If you would like to showcase your district’s or school’s accomplishments, please contact us at schools@sustainablejersey.com.

Resources

**EMPLOYEE WELLNESS TOOLKITS**

**Alliance for a Healthier Generation. Healthy Schools Program**

The Alliance’s Healthy Schools Program brings parents, school staff, and students together to turn schools into healthier places. Employee Wellness is one of seven focus areas. Click on the link to access a variety of guidance documents.

https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take_action/schools/employee_wellness/

**California Department of Public Health, Worksite Program California Fit Business Kit**

This suite of tools and resources is designed to help employers develop and implement a workplace culture and environment that support healthy eating and physical activity among workers. This Kit contains 13 individual components, all of which have been evaluated by a diverse mix of businesses from across the state and have been designed to be easily implemented at any worksite. The tools can be used individually or as part of a comprehensive worksite wellness program.


**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Healthier Worksite Initiative**

As part the Healthier Worksite Initiative CDC has assembled a comprehensive library of toolkits in five main categories: General Workforce Health Promotion, Nutritious Eating, Physical Activity, Preventative Health Screenings, and Healthy Choices. These timesaving aids provide customizable turn-key solutions to help program planners plan, implement and evaluate their initiatives.

https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/

**Directors of Health Promotion and Education, School Employee Wellness: A Guide for Protecting the Assets of Our Nation’s Schools**

The purpose of this guide is to (1) promote the benefits of school employee wellness programs; (2) provide a model for establishing, implementing, and sustaining a school employee wellness program; and (3) supply practical tools and resources to support the implementation of school employee wellness programs.


**Eat Smart, Move More NC!, NC Health Smart School Worksite Wellness Toolkit**

This a comprehensive collection of guidelines and ready-to-use materials to organize a worksite wellness committee and implement worksite wellness programs in schools. The Toolkit is comprised of five workbooks - one on starting or enhancing an effective wellness committee, and four resource books that address the main aspects of a healthy lifestyle: healthy eating, physical activity, tobacco cessation and stress management.


**Monmouth Conservation Foundation**

Offers donation based Forest Therapy Walks and Yoga Hikes. A custom outing can be scheduled for your staff

http://www.monmouthconservation.org/walks/

**New Jersey Blue Cross Blue Shield, NJWELL**
NJWELL’s mission is to cultivate healthy lifestyle choices among active NJ State Health Benefit Program members, reduce health risk factors, improve well-being, and ensure that New Jersey’s public employees remain healthy, inspired and productive in the years to come. It includes a new way to improve health and get rewarded for it. _CaféWell_is a groundbreaking Health Optimization Platform™ designed to help manage stress, nutrition, weight loss and more.

http://shbp.horizonblue.com/health-wellness

Other Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, LEAN Works! – A Workplace Obesity Prevention Program.
https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/


Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools, School Wellness Benefits
http://thrivingschools.kaiserpermanente.org/make-the-case/

Michigan Department of Education, School Staff Wellness Challenges and Recognition Ideas.

Oregon Education Association Trust, Blueprint for School Employee Wellness.
http://www.oeachoice.com/

RMC Health Staff Wellness in the School.
http://rmc.org/category/topics/staff-wellness/