School Employee Wellness – Creating a Culture of Health

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Valuing School Employee Wellness

School employees are charged with one of the nation’s most critical functions – preparing our young people to become successful citizens. Ensuring teachers and school staff are healthy and feel good is critical to supporting the achievement of students. Supporting teachers and all school employees to be healthy creates a culture of health and wellness and provides students a model of how to adopt and maintain healthy behaviors.

Creating a Culture of Health

The Culture of Health framework is adapted from a National Governors Association Center for Best Practices Issue Brief - Creating Healthy States: Building Healthy Worksites. The framework shows that, in order for people to take charge of their own health, they need supportive benefits and workplaces.

A culture of health is an environment that values and supports health and well being. Schools and districts can work to create a culture of health within their worksites. To create a culture of health, employees need a supportive workplace with structures, systems and policies in place to support healthy behaviors. A culture of health is also supported by robust employee benefits, such as the benefits employees have through the Oregon Educators Benefit Board (OEBB).

The Public Health Division and OEBB are partnering to create a culture of health in school settings with the goal to increase the number of school employee wellness programs in Oregon schools that meet nationally recognized standards.
What Does a Supportive Workplace Look Like?

A supportive workplace has structures, systems and policies in place to help employees. For example, schools have tobacco-free campuses to protect students and employees from secondhand smoke. This creates a supportive environment for non smokers and those trying to quit tobacco. This policy works! Smoking prevalence among school employees is only 5% (2010 BSSE). Among comparable Oregon adults who are insured and employed, 14% smoke (2009 BRFSS).

What else can worksites do to support a culture of health?

- Form a Wellness Committee dedicated to employee health
- Create an operational plan
- Establish guidelines for healthy food at employee meetings or in the break room
- Establish a policy to encourage physical activity opportunities during the day
- Have safe bike parking and a place to change clothes to encourage active transportation

Creating a culture of health requires administrative support and active engagement. By helping employees understand their benefits, engaging employees to take charge of their health and creating supportive workplaces, schools can continue to be places where children and staff learn and thrive.

For questions or comments please contact Rebecca Pawlak at rebecca.l.pawlak@state.or.us.

Resources

Directors of Health Promotion and Education’s School Employee Wellness Guide

OEA Choice Trust – Wellness Grant Opportunities

Wellness@Work website and assessment tool