**Key Principles for School Employee Wellness Programs**

**(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. 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. Some districts are turning to a results-oriented or “population health management” approach to school employee wellness. This approach uses annual individual health risk appraisals to provide data as a basis for designing targeted health-promotion interventions. Each school will have to develop its own method of assessing your staff’s health risk. 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.

Examples of Employee Wellness Activities:

* Blood Pressure Screening
* Breast Cancer
* Colorectal Screening
* Diabetes
* Height and Weight or Body Mass Index
* Oral Health
* Serum Cholesterol
* Skin Cancer
* Crisis Intervention for personal problems
* Nutrition Education
* Physical Activity and Fitness Counseling
* Stress Management education
* Tobacco Cessation
* Weight Management

**(3) Start small and build a foundation**

Existing school employee 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 worksite wellness programs 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. Some school employee wellness programs are staffed by volunteers; others have wellness leaders. Some school employee wellness programs (that offered good services) may charge fees for participation; and still others are cost-free, using school facilities and offering classes and activities organized by volunteers. Starting small can provide the foundation for evolution to a more ambitious, comprehensive, results-oriented program. School wellness programs should start with the element or elements that can be most easily introduced and later build on that foundation.

**(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. These allies can be conceptualized as *obvious allies* and *less obvious allies*. The school employees who implement the other seven components of coordinated school health programs are **obvious allies** who can make valuable contributions to the eighth component, school employee wellness. These allies include health educators; physical educators; licensed health professionals within the school such as school nurses, licensed or vocational nurses, medical doctors, nurse practitioners and certified personal trainers; 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 employee wellness program. Whereas members of “school health teams” are highly qualified to address physical, mental, and social health needs, they are unlikely to be part of the organizational structure of school boards, where policies are crafted and decisions, especially those with fiscal implications, are made. Less obvious allies are more likely to have direct access to the superintendent, be part of the superintendent’s staff, and communicate freely with the governing board (school boards and Tribal Council members).

**Steps for Establishing a School Employee Wellness Program**

Step 1: Obtain administrative support

Step 2: Identify resources

Step 3: Identify a leader

Step 4: Organize a committee

Step 5: Gather and analyze data

Step 6: Develop a plan

Step 7: Implement the plan

Step 8: Evaluate and adapt the program

Step 9: Sustain the program

**Potential Benefits of School Employee Wellness Programs**

Decreased employee absenteeism

Lower health care and insurance costs

Increased employee retention

Improved employee morale

Fewer work-related injuries

Fewer worker compensation and disability claims

Attractiveness to prospective employees

Positive community image

Increased productivity

Increased motivation to teach about health

Increased motivation to practice healthy behaviors

Healthy role models for students

For a school employee 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, as well as other powerful decision makers within the school system. Other powerful decision makers within the school system who are crucial to gaining administrative support and funding for employee wellness programs include the following: