

Providing Incentives for School Wellness Council Participation – A Case Study

WEST FLORENCE HIGH SCHOOL - FLORENCE, SOUTH CAROLINA

“Teachers are asked to do a lot of nonsense and we think, ‘Are you kidding?’ But this is different because I know that this matters and this will make a difference” states-Hoai-My Winder, high school physical education teacher in Las Vegas, Nevada.

A school wellness council is only as strong as its members. In order for a school wellness council to succeed, it needs to have motivated people that plan, delegate, coordinate, speak up and work hard. For years, school budgets have been decreasing but the amount of work that needs to happen has not.

For some people, intrinsic motivation is enough to take on a new challenge. Many districts, have discovered that school wellness councils can be much more effective if the members are motivated by more than their good hearts, and if they can tie the work with other professional goals. This case study takes a deeper look at some strategies used by Healthy Schools Program members across the country to build and sustain effective and motivated school wellness councils.

Goal Based Evaluation

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In the district's first year of participation in the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program, physical education teacher Pete Ellis admits that there were mostly “lone rangers” leading school wellness efforts across the district. He was teaching at Easterling Primary School in Marion School District One when the idea hit him - all teachers need to select a goal to work towards for their professional development plans. Why not work on improving wellness for students and staff?

Goal-Based Evaluation (GBE) is used by school districts in South Carolina, and elsewhere, as a formative teacher evaluation system designed to support ongoing professional growth and development of certified staff. It empowers teachers to direct their own professional development, encouraging teacher growth in areas of interest to the teacher and benefit to the students and school community. Ellis proposed his idea, the principal approved and the school is now has received the Bronze National Recognition Award from the Alliance for implementing best practices in the areas of school meals, physical education, health education and staff wellness.

Ellis moved to another South Carolina school, West Florence High School, in Florence School District One, and joined the Healthy Schools Program. “I think the principal was hesitant at first,” Ellis said. “She was trying to protect me, assuming that all of the council work would fall on me. I reassured her that if the staff is allowed to work on wellness as part of their GBE, there will be plenty of people to share the workload.” Principal Pam Quick agreed and when Ellis shared this news with the staff, he had 14 colleagues ask to join the school wellness council.

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“Tying the Healthy Schools Program work to the Goal-Based Evaluation is effective in increasing staff participation in the wellness council,” said Beth Barry, South Carolina Program Manager for the Alliance’s Healthy Schools Program. “School staff members have changed their perspective from seeing this as an additional responsibility to an opportunity to meet their evaluation requirements through an initiative that is both professionally and personally relevant.”

“It also helps to increase the awareness of school and community stakeholders. Thanks to the leadership of Pete Ellis we now have many teachers and other building staff such as school nurses, in several South Carolina school districts who are using their work with the Alliance for their GBE and successfully engaging colleagues in the effort.”

Tips from Pete Ellis on Sustaining School Wellness Councils:

1. Reach out to active members of the school in small groups and let them recruit others to create a pyramid effect where the “lone rangers” recruit deputies.
2. Let everyone know that their work on the wellness council can be used for their Goal-Based Evaluation. This will encourage some staff members to seek out additional responsibilities in this area.
3. Providing GBE templates that staff can modify to fit their specific role on the wellness council gives teachers and staff a concrete example of how their work can be incorporated into their professional goals.
4. Start with easy goals that are attainable and remember that your first goal is to simply provide awareness and opportunity. A small action can lead to more ideas and accepting suggestions from new members gives them a sense of ownership in the group.
5. “I have learned ‘If it ain’t fun, it don’t get done!’”

Professional Development/Continuing Education Opportunities

Professional development credits (also known as in-service points or CEUs) are often required for school staff to earn toward recertification, yet those opportunities from the district are being limited by budgets. The Healthy Schools Program workshops and webinars provide a useful and no cost way for districts to provide professional development opportunities for staff in a meaningful and relevant way.

In Rowan County, Kentucky, the district liaison to the Healthy Schools Program received contact hours for attending Healthy Schools Program workshops and for her work on completing the application for the National Recognition Award. Another Kentucky school district has given hours for staff that works on completing the Healthy Schools Program Inventory and action plan on behalf of their schools.

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In Independence, Missouri, the school district implemented a new food service training program that goes even further in encouraging professional development by offering a financial incentive. The district decided to offer food service staff the opportunity to earn increased pay if they attend voluntary training opportunities beyond the minimum level of required trainings.

The district offered some of the voluntary trainings, collaborated with a local community college's culinary programs for other trainings, and provided staff access to various online trainings that meet federal guidelines or are supported by the state DOE (Healthy Edge, Serve Safe, SNA, etc). Food service staff also had the opportunity to tour the warehouse of the distributor that provides produce and learn safe produce handling techniques.

The district food service director notes that they are creating better buy in with changes to preparation processes, food offerings and providing greater support for staff working on the front lines. This new training program is also preparing their staff for federal regulations that will be implemented in the next few years.

How to Make This Happen in Your School District:

Many states allow school districts to have a local professional development committee (LPDC) that determines what professional development can be approved. Check with your LPDC to determine what steps are needed to get approval for Healthy Schools Program trainings or related projects. It never hurts to ask!

Stipends

"Providing a stipend is a really nice way to say 'thank you' for what you are doing," said Lisa Riley, a 2012-13 Healthy Schools Program National Champion and assistant principal in Cabell County, West Virginia. In her county the stipend is \$500 for school wellness council members and is funded by the county. In order to receive the stipend, wellness "coaches" must attend 4-5 meetings a year to share the activities they are doing and to hear from community organizations. They are required to show that they conducted three activities with students and one for staff. Wellness coaches must complete the Healthy Schools Program Inventory and are encouraged to apply for a National Recognition Award if they qualify. "When we first joined the Healthy Schools Program we had people coming and going (on the school wellness councils) but now we have a core group," Riley said. "These are the people that are motivated and truly passionate about making their school healthier."

A similar system is working in Wheeling, West Virginia, where the Board of Education has approved a stipend of \$150 for wellness coaches at each school. Renee Griffin, Director of Child Nutrition and Wellness, shared that "the wellness coaches are responsible for working with their principal and school community to promote wellness. They keep up a bulletin board with information on wellness opportunities and complete the Healthy Schools Program Inventory. If the school wants to apply for the National Recognition Award, the wellness coach coordinates the process. The wellness coaches from across the district meet quarterly to discuss activities and share ideas."

In Osceola County, Florida, the wellness coordinators from each school come together once a month as a group. In addition to receiving a stipend for serving as a wellness coordinator (the stipends are funded by their insurance company), they receive in-service points for participating in these meetings. Wellness coordinators use this time to share ideas, hear from community organizations and resource providers as well as attend Healthy Schools Program workshops.