

Supporting the Implementation of School-Based Employee Wellness Programs

Position

SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators supports schools in planning, implementing and sustaining school-based employee wellness policies and programs.

Rationale

School-based employee wellness is vital for creating a vibrant school community where making healthy choices comes easy and is the norm. Effective employee wellness programs infuse well-being into every aspect of the school, including the culture, the environment and the individual wellness opportunities available for faculty and staff. Employee wellness is one of the ten components of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model, and a healthy student body is incumbent upon healthy school employees (Birch & Videto, 2015). Results from the 2012 *School Health Policies and Practices Study* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS] & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2013) suggested that only 40.1% of districts had a designated individual to oversee health-promotion activities for faculty and staff, and only 15.7% of districts had adopted a policy stating that each school must have a designated individual to oversee employee wellness policies and programs. SHAPE America is committed to empowering children to live healthy and active lives, and there is a high level of interdependence between employee wellness and student wellness. SHAPE America asserts that engagement of both students and employees in comprehensive school wellness programs is integral to creating a sustainable healthy community in schools (ASCD, 2014).

Background

Employee wellness programs (EWPs), also known as workplace wellness programs (WWPs), have been around for decades within the private sector. The success of these programs, in conjunction with recommendations for worksite wellness as part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), have led governmental organizations and schools to place an increased emphasis on employee wellness (Otenyo & Smith, 2017). Nearly five percent of the working population — more than 6.7 million adults — in the United States is employed by the U.S. school system (Alliance for a Healthier Generation, 2013). Schools are a viable location for implementing employee wellness programs, and the ACA considers employee wellness programs to be a vital component of an effective health care system (Moran, 2013).

The CDC and ASCD include employee wellness within the WSCC model, the framework that SHAPE America supports for promoting health and academic success in schools. As part of the ten-component WSCC model, employee wellness programs are important for school employees' well-being and reduce employee turnover, employee absenteeism, and the costs of

substitutes. Employee wellness programs improve morale in the worksite and decrease employee health insurance premiums (CDC, 2015). In essence, school-based employee wellness programs have clear benefits for 1) school employees, 2) students, 3) school climate, 4) the school budget, and 5) the health care system (ASCD, 2015; Alker, Wang, Pbert, Thorsen, & Lemon, 2015; CDC, 2015).

SHAPE America is committed to providing professional development and advocacy to enhance health and physical education, physical activity, and overall wellness in schools. Employee wellness is a requisite for creating a positive culture where healthy behaviors are both valued and modelled within the school system (Birch and Videto, 2015). A school-based employee wellness approach is a comprehensive set of programs, policies, benefits and environmental supports that address various risk factors, including but not limited to lack of physical activity, unhealthy dietary habits, stress management, and tobacco use (CDC, 2015). The coordinated approach should also work to prevent common health conditions such as diabetes, sleep disorders and depression, and to meet the safety needs of all employees. The following contextual factors contribute to a culture of employee wellness in schools:

- The physical, emotional, academic and social school climate is safe, friendly and student-centered.
- Opportunities exist for school employees to adopt or maintain active lifestyles, be tobacco free, manage stress, avoid injury, and avoid exposure to hazards (e.g., mold, asbestos).
- Partnerships between school districts and health insurance providers are established to offer resources, including personalized health assessments and flu vaccinations.
- The school has a vision to have productive, satisfied employees with a high sense of job satisfaction and well-being.
- Easily accessible opportunities and environmental supports are available for employees to optimize their health and well-being (Putnam, 2015).
- Programs, policies and incentives are in place to encourage employees to be positively engaged in health-enhancing opportunities and practices before, during and after the school/work day.
- Employees are provided with increased outdoor, indoor and indirect exposures to nature (Trau, Keenan, Goforth, & Large, 2016).
- Employee wellness is part of the school improvement plan to hold schools accountable for carrying out and enhancing their school-based employee wellness policy/program.

In addition to the WSCC model, a healthy school community that values both employee wellness and student wellness supports the mission of comprehensive school physical activity programs (CSPAP). Within the CSPAP model, all school personnel are viewed as key players in modeling and promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles (Centeio & McCaughtry, 2017). SHAPE America supports school-based employee wellness programs as a vital component of creating a whole-school culture that values wellness, following the WSCC and CSPAP models.

Evidence Supporting School-Based Employee Wellness Programs

The following trends serve to support employee wellness programs in schools:

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- Employer-based health insurance plans cover more than half of Americans, and workers spend most of the day on the job (Baicker, Cutler, & Song, 2010).
- An increase in health risk factors, including obesity, smoking and depression, is linked to a decrease in work productivity among school employees. School-based employee wellness programs can reduce these risk factors and improve work productivity and staff morale (Alker et al., 2015).
- Healthy school employees — including teachers, administrators, bus drivers, cafeteria and custodial staff, and contractors — are more productive and less likely to be absent. They serve as powerful role models for students and may increase their attention to students' health (CDC, 2015).
- School-based employee wellness programs have the ability to improve the health of the estimated 6.7 million faculty and staff employed by elementary and secondary schools in the United States. This would save funds that could then be reallocated to other needs (Snyder & Dillow, 2011).
- Employee wellness programs are effective at reducing health care costs and increasing productivity within the workplace, and produce, on average, a \$5.81-to-\$1 return-on-investment ratio (Chapman, 2005; USDHHS & CDC, 2013). Population-oriented programs and policies that include preventive versus reactive employee wellness programs yield, on average, a 26% reduction in health care costs (Nash, Reifsnyder, Fabius, & Pracilio, 2011).

Impact on the Profession

Schools are part of the medical neighborhood (locations and organizations within a community that can actively promote fitness, healthy behaviors, proper nutrition, and healthy environments), and SHAPE America is committed to enhancing the health and well-being of our society through schools. In relation to wellness and sustainable health and activity behaviors, environments either nourish and promote healthy lifestyles or deny individuals opportunities to enhance their well-being (Arloski, 2009). Schools are well positioned to serve as environments that nourish healthy living. For lasting behavior change, health and physical education programs must be delivered within schools that value wellness as a whole; this includes but is not limited to the implementation and accountability of school-based employee wellness programs.

Impact of Healthy Employees on Students

Improving the wellness of employees can directly affect the health of students, not just through improved job performance, but also through the positive role-modeling of healthy behaviors (Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, 2016). School-based employee wellness programs and policies may improve both teacher attendance and teacher performance while on the job. Supporting the physical, emotional and social health and wellness of employees who work with students, either directly or indirectly, contributes to greater productivity in schools. SHAPE America believes that healthy school employees help foster an environment in which students can be healthy. SHAPE America recommends that health and physical education teachers take an active role in advocating for the development, implementation and accountability of school-based employee wellness programs.

Policy Recommendations

SHAPE America provides the following best practices for employee wellness programs and policies in schools:

- The school district's mission statement and strategic plan include wellness as a key component.
- School-based employee wellness is a key component of the action plan for the school improvement plan.
- The school improvement plan includes a wellness goal, supported by action plans and accountability measures reported to the school wellness council and school board.
- School-based employee wellness is part of the professional development plan, and wellness coordinators, as well as administrators, teachers and staff, receive professional development in how to facilitate whole-school wellness and take part in professional development activities that encourage employees to enhance their own health, physical activity and well-being.
- The school identifies and collaborates with families, the community, health insurance companies, and other external constituents to maintain a holistic and comprehensive school-based employee wellness program.
- School leaders are trained in (and value) employee wellness as a key component of a healthy and effective workplace (Nash et al., 2011; Hoert, Herd, & Hambrick, 2016).
- A proactive, population-based employee wellness approach is taken within the school, and needs assessments are conducted regularly to identify new areas for programming or updating the school-based employee wellness policy (Nash et al., 2011; Birch & Videto, 2015).
- School-based employee wellness is an integral component of each school's wellness policy and the school's designated wellness committee regularly reviews the alignment of policies and practices to ensure the health, safety and well-being of all school employees.
Both formative and summative assessment are used to evaluate the effectiveness of school-based employee wellness programs.

SHAPE America recommends that schools develop a school district health and wellness profile and examine factors relating to school-based employee wellness, among other aspects of wellness based on the WSCC model. The following assessments should be considered as part of the school's wellness profile:

- WellSAT assessment
- School Health Index
- Focus group discussions
- Comprehensive School Climate Survey: Personnel section

Suggested Citation

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