

Investing in School Staff Health: Protecting the Workforce of Today to Nurture Our Youth for Tomorrow

Directors of Health Promotion and Education

Problem Overview

School systems employ more than 4% of the U.S. workforce, totaling more than 6.7 million people. Although addressing the well-being of schoolchildren is a major concern among health and education agencies, the nation historically underemphasizes efforts to maintain and improve the health of those caring for schoolchildren. Many private companies have instituted worksite health promotion programs to improve the health and productivity of their workers and reduce healthcare costs. Few school systems across the country, however, have established employee wellness programs.

Program Description

In May 2007, the Directors of Health Promotion and Education (DHPE), with support from CDC, released *School Employee Wellness: A Guide for Protecting the Assets of Our Nation's Schools*. This publication is the first comprehensive guide to provide information, practical tools, and resources for school employee wellness programs. It is designed to help schools, school districts, and states develop and support implementation of programs that promote employee health, improve workforce productivity, and reduce the costs of employee absenteeism and healthcare. DHPE, an organization representing 66 directors of U.S. state and territorial health departments and Indian Health Service health education units, conducts programs and promotes policy development in numerous public health areas.

Program Impact

The School Employee Wellness Guide, developed in collaboration with many national health and education groups, is a significant new resource for addressing the health of school employees. Opportunities for school staff to improve their health status through health education, good nutrition, and physical fitness activities can encourage staff commitment to a healthy lifestyle and foster support for the school's overall coordinated health program. As staff improve their own physical activity and dietary behaviors, they also serve as positive role models for students.

DHPE's *School Employee Wellness Guide* is an important tool for the educational environment. The guide is being disseminated through a Web site (www.schoolempwell.org) and promoted through national organizations, presentations, and meetings. In addition to providing downloadable copies of the guide, the Web site features fact sheets, PowerPoint presentations, and other resources. In the first 3 months following the guide's release, more than 2,000 Web site visitors registered to access the materials.

Note: Success stories, including background data and outcomes, reflect information as reported by participating programs. Also, in this context, impact refers to short-term or intermediate outcomes.

