

At-a-glance: Engaging school district employees in well-being

School district employees may face barriers to engagement in a health and well-being program. These employees may lack flexibility related to when and how their work is performed, leading to feelings of burnout or lack of interest in additional programs through their employer. A few significant barriers that may be present include:

- Time constraints and tight schedules (during and outside of work)
- Multiple locations with different start and end times (e.g., high school versus elementary school)
- Inflexible PTO
- Communication fatigue (e.g., company email, intranet, social media, etc.)

Keep the following tips in mind as you seek to engage school district employees in your health and well-being program.



Provide onsite events during staff meetings

Staff meetings, such as Professional Development days, are great opportunities for hosting onsite events, such as a biometric screening, flu shot clinic, or mammogram van event. Providing an event during a mandatory meeting ensures that employees can participate in an activity that may normally interfere with their typical workday. You may choose to schedule an event before or after a meeting, but you may also use it as a break in the day that will allow employees to reset. You may also work with community partners to provide demonstrations and/or exercise breaks like group stretching and yoga. If you work with a UnitedHealthcare onsite coordinator, nurse, or coach, this would be a good time for them to present and discuss the company well-being program.



Host virtual, evening and weekend events

While most companies prefer to host events and activities during the workday, that may not work well for school districts. Due to multiple locations and inflexible schedules, it is best to host an event after work hours. You may choose to do so at a central location that may accommodate all staff members, or provide an activity virtually, such as an evening webinar or virtual challenge that encourages members to complete activities on their own time. Additionally, if you choose to host an event on a weekend, you must consider other obligations that people may have during that time. It is also recommended to provide family friendly activities, such as a group-exercise program that encourages the whole family to participate, as members may not have convenient access to child-care after work hours. Furthermore, if you'd like to increase event attendance, you may choose to survey the population on employee preferences and plan accordingly.

Finally, keep those in mind who may have non-traditional roles. While the majority of staff members in a school district work during regular business hours, there are many employees who have more untraditional roles, such as those who work in food service, transportation, security, and maintenance. These individuals may work during irregular timeframes, preventing them from participating in events and activities held at certain times of the day.



Develop an effective communication strategy

Effective communication is vital to a successful well-being program. When designing a communication strategy, ensure that all eligible members will receive ongoing health and well-being communications throughout the year via numerous channels. Since school district employees may have limited time to review information, consider using the following:

- Emails (monthly or quarterly)
- Presentations and information sessions during mandatory staff meetings (with time for Q&A)
- Printed flyers (disseminated to employees)
- Posters (placed in centrally located areas)
- Regular updates at team meetings (often by a manager and/or Well-Being Champion)
- Home mailings

Nonetheless, it is possible to over-communicate with staff members, leading to communication fatigue, which may cause annoyance and disinterest in the well-being program altogether. With that said, you may avoid communication fatigue by being specific about how and when you distribute information. For instance, you may send a survey with a registration link for those who want to receive well-being program updates. You may also want to include a disclaimer message in all emails that allows members to unsubscribe from well-being communications. Additionally, it may be beneficial to have an employee well-being page on the district intranet that can be used as a hub for all program information. Once again, if you are unsure of what works best for your staff members, you may choose to send a survey to gain insight on employee communication preferences. Lastly, keep in mind the power of leadership support and don't forget to leverage the Wellness Champions network to increase awareness and advocacy of the well-being program.



Highlight behavioral health tools and resources

Finally, school district staff may suffer from compassion fatigue, as many employees are focused on the well-being of the students rather than their own mental health. Specifically, classroom teachers, counselors, and school secretaries may absorb their students' trauma to the point of emotional and physical exhaustion.¹

With that said, ensure that all members have access to behavioral health tools, such as the Employee Assistance Program, local support groups, or resources that are available through the medical plan. To learn more about the behavioral health tools and resources that are available through UnitedHealthcare, please work with your UnitedHealthcare team.



Implementing the tips above may be helpful in engaging school district employees in a well-being program. Additionally, don't lose sight of other important aspects of a well-being engagement strategy, such as securing senior and middle management support, aligning the worksite environment with a focus on well-being, building a well-being champion network, offering incentives, and obtaining employee feedback.

Source:

1. neaToday. <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/compassion-fatigue-teachers#:~:text=Compassion%20fatigue%20is%20the%20most,can%20come%20at%20a%20price.2023>. Accessed March 2024.

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