

Grantee Convening

Facilitated Discussion Summary

On February 12, 2009, the Osteopathic Heritage Foundation of Nelsonville hosted a grantee convening for its School Wellness Initiative in Southeast Ohio. Representatives from each of the 13 participating school districts engaged in a discussion on four topics: nutrition, physical activity/physical education, impact/achievement, and sustainability. The Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs at Ohio University facilitated the groups by reading the questions, encouraging discussion, and having participants capture at least one idea on a sticky note that they then posted on flipchart paper. The summary below includes these ideas, organized by themes. Some responses may crosscut among the topics in that what was discussed on nutrition or physical activity/education may also be noted later as an accomplishment.

Nutrition

Districts discussed how to continue to promote healthy eating among students despite healthier food being more expensive.

School Garden/Greenhouse

Two districts discussed creating greenhouses and gardens at their schools to allow students to grow and eat healthy food at school. A number of district staff noted these as good ideas. Additional benefits of gardens and greenhouses that were discussed include:

- teaching food sustainability
- developing skills for students to use throughout a lifetime (e.g., knowing how to grow vegetables)
- learning business skills by selling extra food at local farmers market
- providing a dual benefit of eating healthy, locally grown food and being physically active by having students maintain gardens

Engagement and Involvement

District staff shared a variety of ways that they involve or engage students in healthy eating.

- Obtain student input on what fresh fruit/vegetables they will eat to avoid wasting money on food items that will not sell. For example, one district asked students what they liked and stocked the salad bar with it. Math students in another district conducted a student survey to find out students' preferences.
- Involve students in food service production to help them understand more about food
- A senior project is going to be creating a salad bar
- One district bought a milk machine and included nutritious snacks in it. They formed a student committee to select healthy items for it (e.g., V8 juice). The machine is turning a 35% profit.
- Host a healthy scavenger hunt for students

Two ideas for positive student reinforcement include:

- Highlighting healthy eating choices and information in Health Team's quarterly newsletter
- Spotlighting nutrition positively by featuring students who were "caught eating healthy" on bulletin boards and having healthy prizes for positive modeling

Teachers:

- Involve teachers in health parties; have teachers and administrators serve as examples for students; integrate healthy and affordable eating into the curriculum

Families and Communities:

- Family Fun Nights which allow community and family involvement and offer a positive experience for the entire school community. One district mentioned inviting a dietician from a local university to the event to discuss healthy foods and show people how to make smoothies.
- Activities to get the community involved to learn (and get excited about) healthy lifestyles and nutrition
- Health Fairs – one district used this to kick off the opening of their fitness center

Increase Fruits and Vegetables

Some districts have received supplemental grants from the Ohio Department of Education's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program. Districts discussed also applying for grants that provide healthy snacks after lunch, which several districts showed interest in pursuing. Other ideas districts shared include:

- Receiving a grant through Action For Healthy Kids for fresh fruits and vegetables
- Offering theme days such as "Fruity Friday" to promote healthy snacks
- Putting vegetables in baggies for the à la carte line
- Implementing a Grab n' Go breakfast with pre-packaged food for students to take to the classroom
- Serving breakfast at 7:30 am and 10:00 am because some children are not hungry until later
- Buying small refrigerators for classrooms to allow students to save extras or unopened items for later

Other Ideas

- Switch to using hard trays rather than Styrofoam
- Do not assume healthier foods are more expensive
- Educate food service employees about how money is spent
- Contact Hunger Alliance to train food service personnel on how to offer healthy, affordable food (Charlie Kozlesky (800) 227-6446, ext. 221)
- Utilize United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) money to financially stabilize the cafeteria (relieve stress of cafeteria staff) and then in turn allow other changes to occur
- Suggestion to “separate control the USDA has over school food choices and share that control with the Ohio Department of Health and/or Education (for more information view Michael Pollan’s video at www.communityfoodinitiatives.com)”

Obstacles

Two obstacle district staff discussed included the cost of food and the availability of soda at schools, along with the discretionary funds from sales of it.

Physical Activity and Physical Education

Districts have installed walking trails, fitness centers, and purchased new equipment. This discussion focused on what districts have done to promote the use of those facilities and to generally promote physical activity among students, staff, and the community.

Promoting Walking/Fitness Trails and Fitness Centers

Several districts have built walking trails and/or fitness centers for school and community use. Ideas for promoting these and incorporating them into regular activities include:

- Family Fun Fitness/Wellness Nights (“Get Movin’ Night”)
- Utilizing the school’s sports teams as volunteers
- 5K Run/Walk events (“Turkey Trot”)
- Do a survey on the use of fitness center; plus, it will get the word out about the fitness center
- “Relay for Life” event on walking trail
- Promoted fitness center during Go Red Week and designed t-shirts for the event
- Trail Marathon Club
- Haunted Trail fundraiser
- Raffles held during wellness events

Promoting Physical Education Equipment

Districts were asked what they have done to promote the use of the new physical education equipment now available for their programs. Several districts noted the following ideas.

- Setting time after school for students to be able to use equipment
- Increasing physical education instructional time that elementary students receive from 12 weeks to 36 weeks per school year
- Offering step aerobics classes in school and community
- Teaching archery to students for lifetime activity

Several district staff noted that they engaged families by first directing programs at students.

- Introduced family activities to students through physical education classes
- Gave students pedometers – then held a fundraiser to raise parent-teacher organization awareness
- Offered yoga in the fitness room – interest started with youth, then parents wanted it

Promoting Physical Activity and Wellness

Participants discussed a variety of promotional activities, including:

- Providing health screenings; partnering with Health Department and Hospital to do a Health Fair. One district noted the health department staff conducted initial screenings for staff and will return for follow-up measurements.
- Tracking students' walking distances and create a map on the floor to walk across the country
- Keying off television shows such as "Celebrity Chef"/"Survivor" – for example one district noted participants can lose points during a weekly challenge for staff that costs \$1 to join and the winner gets a \$500 pot.
- Promoting involvement of the Health and Wellness Team members in the monthly district newsletter

Increasing Physical Activity for Students

District staff shared ways they have provided more physical activity opportunities for students.

- Fitness Camp held two nights a week after school
- Implementing "Jammin' Minute," one-minute exercise routines repeated through the school day
- Dedicated time in morning for elementary students to walk before class – classrooms track participation with stickers on a calendar
- Rewards – allow time after school for use of equipment; the class bringing in the most box tops gets a dance-dance-revolution day

Challenges/Obstacles

Some participants noted challenges and obstacles for physical activity and education.

- Need to keep physical education teachers in school
- Need more physical education time per day for students
- Suggestion to read “Last Child in the Woods” to get the concept of Nature Deficit Disorder (children spending less time outdoors) on the radar of administration and staff

Initiative’s Impact/Achievement

District representatives were asked to share their achievements or successes since becoming involved in the School Wellness Initiative. Responses ranged from nutritional changes to excitement over wellness.

Engagement and Involvement

Frequently, engagement and involvement were noted as project successes. Specific areas of increased engagement through this Initiative include:

- Having the Health Services Committee recognized as part of the district, developing and sustaining plan for funded projects
- Increased awareness regarding well-being, a coordinated well-being program rather than piecemeal efforts
- Community Wellness
- Community support and engagement
- Involvement of students and staff; community involvement in making their community healthier
- Outlook of administration
- More administrative buy-in
- Increased awareness at all levels
- Excitement!

Food Service/Vending

Changes to menus and increases in availability of more nutritious foods were seen as important achievements among the school wellness council representatives.

- Three school districts discussed changes in their vending policies – one district eliminated pop and another instituted a “green” program
- Many school districts discussed school menu changes as a part of impact. One district mentioned instituting universal breakfast, another that sustaining healthy eating is best done through educating parents and children, and three other districts mentioned changing their lunch menus to include fruits and vegetables.
- Purchasing a food processor has improved food quality

- No pop sales
- Teacher letter to parents limiting treats; more healthy foods or other non-food treats
- Increased access to fruits and vegetables

Fitness Opportunities

Some school districts listed fitness centers as their biggest achievements, while others noted increasing activity and access to fitness trails as key accomplishments. Other examples include:

- Increased physical fitness activities – outdoor and indoor availability; growth of school district organizations participation
- Fun physical activities
- Walk 10 minutes a day
- Active students more aware

Other Important Achievements Noted

- Two school district mentioned challenging the staff to get healthier, one stating that it had “50-80 [staff doing] Biggest Loser”
- Mental Health Curriculum: bullying, self-mutilation, date rape
- Community wellness newsletter for community awareness – participation

Sustainability of the Initiative

Districts provided numerous projections about what their efforts will hold for the future as well as ideas for sustainability.

Engagement

Engaging community, staff, and students were discussed as project success as well as key to sustaining the School Wellness Initiative within the schools.

Community:

- Seven school districts mentioned the importance of community involvement in relation to sustainability. One in particular mentioned community involvement to “design components to be self-sustaining.”

Staff involvement was seen as a means of creating interest and sustaining activities.

- Two districts discussed staff presence on the district wellness council.
- One stated a concern about getting new members as it “continues to move forward” because otherwise there might be “burn-out” among the committee members.
- One district emphasized staff involvement in getting healthy foods in the classrooms for parties and

celebrations.

- Five school districts mentioned encouraging staff commitment, increasing staff awareness and knowledge, and exciting staff toward changes and policies in sustaining the efforts of the wellness council.

Administrative/School Board Role:

- Three districts pointed out the value in going regularly to school board meetings and giving updates.
- Two school districts stated that having union representatives on the wellness council can be very helpful.
- Three districts mentioned the importance of administrative and school board support, especially in the area of policy and striving to make changes.

Students:

- Involve students (Future Farmers of America) to maintain the fitness trail
- Include youth on the wellness council

Fitness Centers/Facilities

Sustaining fitness centers was a key issue in the sustainability conversations. A number of districts shared concerns, as well as ideas around sustaining fitness centers, including:

- Charging fitness center membership fees to community members and holding fundraisers (two districts mentioned this)
- Using staff to monitor the fitness room might be beneficial and cut costs.
- Selling water to fitness center patrons

Nutrition

Gardens were seen as a sustainable activity.

- Five of the school districts mentioned the importance of self-sustaining gardens in bringing fresh foods and healthy variety to their schools.
- One school district stated that it might “work with vocational agriculture classes.”

General Sustainability Ideas

The school district staff discussed many additional ideas about sustainability. Some of them were:

- Look for creative solutions to monetary problems – finding new grants, look for funding within the local community, creating policies that can be sustained with little or no financial support, and going with momentum to change other policies.
- Menu changes are sustainable
- Create fundraisers around fitness and health, such as 5K runs and competitions