



Promoting Wellness for School Personnel

As educators, your day is focused on meeting the physical, educational and emotional needs of your students. As you selflessly give it your all, it is easy to forget about your own physical and mental wellness. Forgetting to take care of yourself can lead to anxiety, stress, fatigue and burnout. Simple self-care strategies like practicing deep breathing, meditation, journaling or spending time outdoors can go a long way in reviving us and helping us meet life's challenges.

It is important to find time to nurture yourself on a regular basis so you can continue to inspire and engage your students in learning. It does not mean that you care less about your students or your job if you take time out for yourself. In fact, it is the opposite. It will allow you to continue doing the thing you love longer and better.

There are many ways that administrators, educators and staff can work together to foster better physical and mental health wellness in your school district. Some of the following ideas could be implemented district wide, while others would be more conducive to small groups.

- ❖ **Wellness Break Room.** A break room, separate from a regular faculty lunch and work room, can provide a quiet space to relax and recharge during the school day. Engage faculty and staff in creating this space so it is a reflection of their unique interests and that activities that your school personnel find helpful in reducing stress. The purpose of a Wellness Break Room is to create an environment that promotes physical and mental wellness. Some elements to consider include comfortable furniture, plants, soft music and lighting, aromatherapy, a fan and inspiring murals or artwork. Putting up a divider can separate the space in the room so that there is a quiet area for meditation, an area with puzzles or games, or an area where there are yoga mats, free weights and other exercise equipment. A rotating display of self-care books and magazines for this room coordinated by the library staff is a nice addition and can focus on timely topics, such as seasons and holidays, or be responsive to events, such as trauma or loss.

- ❖ **Staff Wellness Committee.** A staff wellness committee focused on developing wellness programs and social outings or other staff bonding activities is a worthwhile investment to promote the physical and mental health of administrators, faculty and staff. In addition to planning a professional development day devoted to this topic, the committee could organize regular activities:

To promote physical health

- Exercise groups - walking, aerobics, yoga
- “Pick-up games” - basketball, volleyball and softball
- Weight room time for teachers before or after school
- Weight loss support group
- Smoking cessation class
- Monthly healthy potluck lunch in the faculty/staff room
- Healthy cookbook with recipe contributions from school personnel/community
- Standing desks for staff who prefer that option

To promote mental health

- Meditation sessions during breaks, before school or after school
- Mental workouts through games like chess, scrabble or puzzles
- Mental wellness messages incorporated into a professional development day or faculty meeting. School districts could bring in a guest speaker, or faculty and staff can be invited to share resources they have found helpful for themselves. The internet provides many excellent, free resources, such as [“Learn to Shine Bright - the importance of Self-care for Teachers”](#) delivered by teacher and yoga instructor Kelly Hopkinson. This 9-minute Ted Talk encourages and empowers teachers to place more emphasis on their well-being.

- ❖ **Wellness mentoring program.** Many school districts have mentors who help new teachers achieve professional success by assisting them with curriculum planning, lesson delivery and classroom management. However, fewer have mentors who work with school staff on social-emotional issues of concern. A mentoring program that would create ‘wellness mentors’ to reach out to staff who need personal support would be invaluable. When faculty or staff are struggling with a challenging student, lack of family engagement, a change in responsibilities, or simply feeling overwhelmed, a peer can often be the most valuable support to share how they have overcome similar experiences.

Some schools also have a faculty or staff member responsible for sending a card or small gift from the faculty association to recognize both joyful or sorrowful moments. Mentors can also be assigned to personally reach out to a staff member in need following a tragic situation.