



SCHOOL EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

Protecting the Assets of our Nation's Schools

More than 6.7 million people are employed by public school systems in the United States – about 3.5 million teachers and 3.2 million other employees.¹ This large workforce is charged with one of the nation's most critical functions – *preparing our youth to become successful and productive citizens*. When school districts ignore the health of their employees, a valuable asset of the nation's school is put at risk. Further, the conditions that affect the health of employees also influence the health and learning of students. Protecting the physical and mental health of school employees is integral to protecting the health of students and ensuring their academic success.

School employees have similar health problems and unhealthy habits, as their counterparts in other segments of the U.S. workforce. Below are facts about the nation's workforce.

- Two-thirds of all deaths in the U.S. can be attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes. The risk factors for these causes of death – *tobacco use, poor eating habits, inadequate physical activity, and overweight* – are preventable.²
- Mental illness costs the U.S. about \$79 billion in 1990, with \$63 billion attributed to loss of productivity.³
- The U.S. spent approximately \$2.0 trillion on healthcare, or \$6,697 per person in 2005. By 2015, health care spending in the U.S. is projected to reach \$4.0 trillion.⁴
- Since 2000, employment-based health insurance premiums have increased 87%, and premiums for employer-sponsored health insurance have been rising four times faster on average than workers' earnings.⁵

WHAT SCHOOL EMPLOYEE WELLNESS PROGRAMS CAN DO

School employee wellness programs can reduce employee health risk behaviors, absenteeism, and escalating costs of health care, as well as identify and correct conditions in the workplace that threaten employee health, reduce their levels of productivity, and impede student success. Healthy employees also become positive role models for their students.

Research confirms that school employees who participate in wellness programs are absent from work less often, increase their productivity, have lower health care and insurance costs, and fewer work-related injuries with associated worker compensation and disability claims. School districts that implement employee wellness programs are able to improve morale and retention of current employees as well as recruit prospective employees more easily.

Research also tells us that worksites benefit financially from employee wellness programs. For example:

- Health care costs per person decrease approximately \$153 with every decrease in the number of risk factors and increase approximately \$350 with every increase in the number of risk factors.⁶
- For every \$1 spent on wellness programs, an average of \$3.50 is saved.⁷
- Employees who participate in wellness programs have lower absenteeism.⁷



SCHOOL EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

Protecting the Assets of our Nation's Schools

A SCHOOL EMPLOYEE SUCCESS STORY

In 2001, Washoe County School District in Nevada offered a variety of wellness programs to encourage school employees to engage in healthy lifestyles. Results indicated that those who did not participate in the voluntary health programs had higher rates (20% higher) of illness-related absenteeism than did employees who participated. A cost-benefit analysis uncovered that the district saved \$15.60 for every dollar spent on the wellness programs. In total, the program saved the district \$2.5 million dollars in a two-year period.^{8,9}

LEARN MORE ABOUT SCHOOL EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

The Directors of Health Promotion and Education (DHPE) have developed *School Employee Wellness: A Guide for Protecting the Assets of Our Nation's Schools*. It is a comprehensive guide that provides information, practical tools and resources for school employee wellness programs. It will help schools, school districts and states develop and support the implementation of school employee wellness programs that promote employee health, improve workforce productivity and reduce the costs of employee absenteeism and healthcare.

Go to www.schoolempwell.org to download your FREE copy today!

- 1 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2005). Digest of Education Statistics Tables and Figures. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Website: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d05/tables/dt05_001.asp. Retrieved June 14, 2006.
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health. (2006). United States 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBSS) results. Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/pdf/mortality/USA.pdf>. Retrieved February 8, 2007.
- 3 Saleem, H.T. (2003). New law moves insurance plans closer to total mental health parity. U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. Website: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/cwc/cm20030909ar01p1.htm#7>. Retrieved January 24, 2004.
- 4 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services. National health expenditure data. Website: http://www.cms.hhs.gov/NationalHealthExpendData/02_NationalHealthAccountsHistorical.asp#TopOfPage. Retrieved February 13, 2004.
- 5 The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. (2006). Employee health benefits: 2006 annual survey. Website: <http://www.kff.org/insurance/7315/index.cfm>. Retrieved February 13, 2004.
- 6 O'Donnell, M.P. (2002). Employer's financial perspective on workplace health promotion in *Health promotion in the workplace, third edition*, M.P. O'Donnell, ed. Albany, NY: Delmar.
- 7 Whitmer, R.W., Pelletier, K.R., Anderson, D.R., Baase, C.M., and Frost, C.J. (2003). A wake-up call for corporate America. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 45:9, 916-925.
- 8 Aldana, S.G., Merrill, R.M., Price, K., Hardy, A., and Hager, R. (2005). Financial impact of a comprehensive workplace health promotion program. *Preventive Medicine*, 40, 131-137.
- 9 Partnership for Prevention. (2001). *Healthy workforce 2010: An essential health promotion sourcebook for employers, large and small*. Washington, DC: Partnership for Prevention.

