

Spotlight on Success: Thomasville City Schools



Thomasville City Schools (TCS) is a small school district located in Thomasville, North Carolina (population 27,000). The school district has approximately 2,500 students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and over 95% of students are from families that live below the federal poverty line. TCS has four school buildings including primary, elementary, middle and high school, and three of the schools receive Title 1 funding. The district has a long history of prioritizing the health and wellness of students and staff. This is reflected in its mission and vision, which include educating the whole child and “promoting the health and well-being of students and staff: emotional, physical and nutritional.”¹

TCS’ focus on health and wellness began in 2006 with the adoption and implementation of the Coordinated School Health (CSH) model, led by a visionary superintendent who was passionate about addressing the needs of the whole child. As a result of this vision, a part-time wellness

coordinator position was created, funded locally. The wellness coordinator played a pivotal role in educating school administrators, staff and parents about the importance of health and wellness and the CSH model. This helped to facilitate support and buy-in, leading to the adoption of a strong district wellness policy in 2008 that exceeded the federal requirements at the time. In addition, school-level wellness teams and the county-level School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) adopted a CSH framework for decision-making, and began to use the CSH model to regularly report to the school board on needs and progress in each of the CSH components. Over time, internal and external support for CSH grew, leading to strong community partnerships and grant funding to support various health-related initiatives. In 2014 TCS was awarded a Healthy Eating Active Living grant from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Thanks to this funding, the district was able to employ a full-time Community Liaison for School Health dedicated to improving physical education and activity, staff wellness and community engagement. In addition, the district strengthened health and mental health services. Currently, the TCS employs a full-time school-based therapist and each of the four schools has 1-2 counselors. Each school has a full-time nurse, with three nurses funded through a partnership with Davidson County Health Department and one funded by TCS.

Because of this strong foundation and support for health and wellness, TCS easily transitioned to the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model when it was introduced in 2014. TCS administrators and staff emphasize the importance of “educating the whole child and providing them with the tools needed for success in life.” The district continues to build upon the foundation established

using the CSH model, aligning assessments, programs, activities and reporting with the whole child approach and the WSCC model. TCS actively collects K-12 health and wellness data each year, with the Community Liaison for School Health assisting the primary and elementary school to complete the School Health Index and the Healthy Active Children progress report required by North Carolina.² Every two years, the middle and high school complete the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. TCS administrators and staff use the data from these assessments and surveys, along with North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey³ and the school nurse report, to inform planning and measure progress in addressing the components of the WSCC model.

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TCS’ efforts to strengthen health and wellness and address the needs of the whole child have helped to transform the culture of the district’s schools, engaged community support, and fostered an environment where all students have the opportunity to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. For TCS, focusing on “whole child” in a district where 96% of students qualify for free or reduced price meals has meant going far beyond academic instruction to meet student’s needs. The district operates a universal free breakfast and lunch program, a summer feeding program, and began a supper program in 2016, feeding an average of 300-400 students

a night. TCS has also partnered with a number of agencies and organizations in the community to support to students. The district works with a local pediatric practice and the local health department to provide students access to basic health services and referrals as needed, as many do not have regular primary care. In addition, Novant Hospital partners with TCS to offer a weeklong summer day camp for students with asthma, including asthma management education and outdoor activities. Communities in Schools, a dropout prevention organization, helps to identify financial resources for eye exams and glasses for students. Other partners include the YMCA and Thomasville Parks and Recreation that provide youth sports opportunities, along with local faith groups and the Thomasville Rotary. By leveraging these types of partnerships and various sources of grant funding, TCS has been able to go beyond what it would be able to do on its own.

A recent assessment of TCS’ implementation of the WSCC model indicated that the district has made significant progress in its efforts to educate the whole child, and has programming in all ten areas of the model.⁴ The assessment was completed at no cost to the district, thanks to a collaboration with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that paired TCS with a public health graduate student seeking to develop a master’s thesis. The results highlighted WSCC components where TCS has made great strides, such as physical education and physical activity, where 97% of student survey participants were able to identify reasons that physical education to lifetime health. It also highlighted areas where the district has an opportunity to strengthen future efforts, including social emotional climate and bullying. TCS has already put a few of the recommendations into practice, and the SHAC and school wellness teams are using the results to inform their planning for educating the whole child going forward.

For more information on the WSCC model:
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsc/index.htm>

FOOTNOTES

¹ Thomasville City Schools. Mission and Beliefs. Available at:

http://www.tcs.k12.nc.us/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=833414&type=d&pREC_ID=749150

² The North Carolina State Board of Education Healthy Active Children Policy requires each local education agency to identify an official who has oversight of the Healthy Active Children Policy, Local Wellness Policy, and the WSCC model. This person is responsible for ensuring implementation and compliance with policies and must submit an annual written progress report. The Healthy Active Children Policy has requirements related to establishing and maintaining a School Health Advisory Council, the WSCC model, the local wellness policy, physical education and healthful living, physical activity and recess, nutrition services, education and promotion, and policy monitoring.

<http://stateboard.ncpublicschools.gov/policy-manual/student-health-issues/healthy-active-children-policy-20161201>

³ North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Available at <https://ncteachingconditions.org/>

⁴ Brandt, Rebecca. 2016. Examining the Application of the Whole School, Whole Child, Whole Community Framework within the Thomasville School District. Available at:

<https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:e72506c9-b929-4cd6-905d-1b9369e044df>

Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model

A Collaborative Approach to Learning and Health

