

Success Stories

Community Partners Support Wellness Policy in Rochester City Schools

Marcia Middleton

Summary

With funding from community partners, financially challenged urban schools are helping students adopt healthier habits. World of Inquiry School #58 in the Rochester City School District received a significant Greater Rochester Health Foundation grant and other community grants to increase physical activity and healthy eating at the school. This funding has helped create innovative school health programs that support Comprehensive School Health initiatives and help to implement the District's Wellness Policy.

Challenge

The Rochester City School District (RCSD) in Rochester, NY, developed a Wellness Policy to improve the lives of its nearly 50,000 students and 6,000 employees by creating healthier environments in District schools and administrative buildings. The policy is based on Coordinated School Health (CSH), an evidence-based strategy that results in improved student health and academic performance, which can help RCSD students to succeed in life. CSH brings together diverse groups within a school community to identify their school's unique health challenges and develop home-grown solutions. All 62 District schools have developed health improvement plans but without community partners to invest in health infrastructure and programs, schools in this under-resourced District face serious barriers to implementing needed improvements.

Solution

Jason Johnson, CSH Administrator for the RCSD, calls CSH "the best thing that has happened in the District." He says CSH helps uncover community resources so schools can take advantage of these opportunities for securing additional health dollars. Johnson's position is funded through a CDC Community Transformation Grant.

World of Inquiry School #58 (WOIS) in the RCSD has benefited from significant community support. In 2011, WOIS received a 3-year \$350,000 grant from the Greater Rochester Health Foundation to increase student physical activity and healthy eating. A Fuel up to Play 60 grant and Action for Healthy Kids grant, funded by other community partners, provided additional support.



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The Rochester City School District's Wellness Policy establishes requirements that will create healthy school environments to help disadvantaged students succeed. But under-resourced urban schools need community partners to help fund infrastructure and create the innovative health programs that will implement the District's Wellness Policy. Schools also need to apply for community grants to help them make health improvements.

Results

At WOIS, an Expeditionary Learning School focused on learning by doing, the motto "we are crew not passengers" encourages high levels of student, staff and parent engagement in all aspects of school life. Amy Shema, WOIS's Health and Wellness Grant Coordinator, says that community support has helped create many innovative health programs at their school, such as:

- K-6 students have fun dancing each Friday morning at Club Tilley and they participate in before and after school fitness clubs.
- Kindergarteners and 1st graders enjoy yoga classes and stability balls work students' core muscles.
- An indoor Walking Trail with 10 stations keep students moving.
- Students can try new healthy foods year-round such as squash, hummus, and papaya.
- Teachers, parents and students receive Healthy Hero Awards throughout the year.

Contact

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"I've seen a health culture shift happen at my school. Kids come up to me to tell me that they've eaten 5 veggies that day or that they asked their mom to buy hummus. They are excited about health now. It's become a way of life."

- Amy Shema, School #58, RCSD

Future Directions

New health initiatives at WOIS this school year:

- A parent-led "Urban Expedition" to promote staff learning about neighborhood resources for outdoor play and recreation, and
- Student taste-testing of unfamiliar, inexpensive grains, e.g., curried lentils, with take home placemats and recipes.

With continued CDC funding for the CSH Administrator, the RCSD will encourage schools to apply for community partner grants to help them make their school environments healthier so students can succeed.

Staff will also receive financial incentives to encourage them to participate in the District's wellness programs offered through Excellus so they can lead healthier lives and be positive role models for students.