Launching the School Employee Wellness Program with a Health Fair

Kelly Meadows, the school health coordinator at West Orange-Cove Consolidated Independent School District in Texas, scheduled a health fair as part of a staff development day at the beginning of the school year. The health fair was developed in partnership with a local hospital who agreed to provide health screenings for school staff. Five physicians from the hospital volunteered their services. A local business donated their services to print a health screening card. Local community-based health agencies were invited to participate in the health fair and provide personal health products, services and information, as well as materials for classroom use. The March of Dimes promoted a program that educates students about birth defects, and the American Cancer Society disseminated information about its cancer prevention activities. The Red Cross decided to schedule a blood drive in conjunction with the fair and 34 pints of blood were donated. All agencies who participated in the health fair were required to contribute a door prize and 5-6 prizes were given away each hour.

The screenings at the health fair identified more than 50 different health problems, of which high blood pressure was the most prevalent. Vision and hearing loss were also common, especially among older staff. Several people were diagnosed with diabetes and were encouraged to contact their physicians. A health interest survey was distributed as well to all school staff attending the health fair. One of the most requested activities by survey participants was a weight control program. The health fair also served healthy refreshments, such as fresh fruit, low-fat cookies, low-salt crackers, and special refreshments for diabetics.

Results of the health fair included:

- the food services director offering healthier snacks for students, especially during test time,
- the school health coordinator observing a shift in teacher snack choices from unhealthy to healthy,
- staff members feeling more comfortable about asking for assistance with health concerns and no longer hesitating to contact the school nurse when they do not feel well,
- an annual health fair for school staff, with increased staff participation (90-95%), and increased participation by community-based health agencies.

In addition to the annual health fair, the district holds an Employee Health and Fitness Day in May that focuses on encouraging staff to maintain health-promoting activities throughout the summer months. Staff members receive health and fitness calendars to record health-promoting activities, such as 30 minutes of physical activity per day during the summer. Staff then returns the calendars at the health fair at the beginning of the next school year to be entered into a door prize drawing.