

Health Promotion and Wellness

**People of all ages can improve the quality
of their lives through a lifelong practice
of moderate physical activity.**

— *Donna E. Shalala*
*U.S. Secretary of Health and Human
Services, 1996*



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DEFINITION

School-site health promotion and wellness programs encourage and support school staff in pursuing healthful behaviors and lifestyles. This component may include planned activities that promote wellness, health assessments, health education, health-related fitness activities, and employee assistance programs. It is expected that a staff person's personal commitment to a healthy lifestyle will be transferred to interest in their students' health and to becoming a positive role model. A strong health promotion/wellness program will contribute to a healthy school environment and climate that affect all of the other components of the Coordinated School Health Program and are inclusive of the community.

In 1985, the Maine Department of Education established health promotion in schools statewide. The Maine School-Site Health Promotion Program provides a model for team-building that schools have used to bring together multidisciplinary teams of superintendents, principals, counselors, nurses, teachers, support staff, school board members, and members of the community for discussions about health and wellness as a priority. The purpose of the team is to design, advocate for, and implement school-wide health education and promotion efforts.

RATIONALE

A school-site health promotion program, often referred to as a *wellness program*, encourages all staff to pursue a healthy lifestyle. It is designed to promote the physical, social, emotional, and mental health of school employees, thus promoting better overall health, improved morale, and a greater personal commitment to the school's coordinated health program. A personal commitment is likely to transfer into greater commitment to the health of students and positive role modeling. In addition to saving on health care costs, some health-conscious school districts see wellness programs as a way to spur recruitment, improve daily attendance and staff morale, earn the loyalty of their workers, and promote employees' general health and well-being.

Organized health promotion/wellness programs in recent years have proven their financial value in both business and public sectors. Today, more than 81 percent of America's businesses with 50 or more employees have some form of health promotion program – the most popular being exercise, smoking cessation classes, back care programs, and stress management. Work-site wellness is health care reform that works.

GUIDELINES:

1. Design or maintain a formal, organized school-site health promotion and wellness program.
2. Secure administrative support for the health promotion/wellness program.
3. Enhance the success of school-site health promotion and wellness through quality health-promotion education and training.

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4. Support a healthy school climate and environment that include health promotion and education.
5. Document the positive effects of a quality school-site health promotion program.

GUIDELINE 1: Design or maintain a formal, organized school-site health promotion and wellness program.

RATIONALE

The year-round health promotion program provides a forum for representatives of all segments of the school or school administrative district to discuss and respond to issues related to health education, health promotion, and the maintenance of a healthy school climate and environment. Research shows that participation in school-site health promotion programs leads to statistically significant changes in tobacco and alcohol use, safety, nutrition, and exercise behaviors. Participation in a wellness conference improves participants' knowledge, attitudes and health practices; it also promotes advocacy for comprehensive health education. Encouragement for the development of programs should be based on the most current research on health and wellness.

INDICATORS:

- A. The school initiates the idea that an investment in the health of faculty and staff is also an investment in the students.
- B. The school establishes a team that involves a wide range of school personnel.
- C. The school assesses needs to determine types of activities, potential barriers and problems, resources and supports, and available team members in developing the health promotion and wellness program.
- D. The school sets goals and objectives and develops an action plan for a year-long health promotion and wellness program.
- E. The school identifies materials and activities needed to implement the action plan.
- F. The school organizes logistics (time, space, resources, information) for successful implementation of the action plan.
- G. The school publicizes and promotes the health promotion and wellness program to build awareness and interest.
- H. The school attracts and maintains participation by scheduling convenient times for meetings and activities and providing healthy snacks and drinks.
- I. The school evaluates the program to measure its quality and effectiveness and the extent of implementation.
- J. The school demonstrates a high level of support for implementation and assessment of comprehensive K – high school health education.
- K. The school promotes health and wellness as an integral part of the Coordinated School Health Program.

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GUIDELINE 2: Secure administrative support for the health promotion/wellness program.

RATIONALE

Administrative support is essential to a successful school health promotion program, since it is the vision of administrators that guides and inspires the school staff. Administrators benefit from health promotion and wellness programs because physically and mentally healthy staff are more likely to be energetic, enthusiastic and effective teachers and to serve as good role models for students

The U.S. Surgeon General has specifically encouraged the nation's schools to adopt the *Healthy People 2010* objectives, recognizing the importance of schools as worksites and that schools are a "natural locus" for educational interventions in health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

INDICATORS:

- A. The administration appropriates funds to develop a successful school-site health promotion program.
- B. The administration advocates for policies to promote a healthy school; for example, an environment free from violence and harrassment, promotion of healthy eating, and opportunities for increased physical activity.
- C. The administration seeks and appoints dedicated, qualified individuals to ensure quality program implementation.
- D. Administrative procedures consistently support the healthy development of youth, teachers and staff.

GUIDELINE 3: Enhance the success of school-site health promotion and wellness through quality health promotion education and training.

RATIONALE

As with all programs, education and training enhance the success of a school-site health promotion program. The Maine Department of Education offers a statewide conference each year for school teams comprised of administrators, teachers, staff and community leaders. The purpose is to heighten awareness of personal and professional issues regarding health and health education. It is hoped that these issues will translate into increased knowledge, more positive

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attitudes, and health-enhancing behaviors. The annual Wellness Conference is the centerpiece of the Maine School-Site Health Promotion Program .

Training and education facilitate teams' ability to incorporate the concept of *wellness as a lifestyle* into their personal and professional lives. Team members need knowledge, skills and commitment in order to establish health promotion efforts in their schools and communities. The Maine School-Site Health Promotion Conference provides a wealth of training and education opportunities through a five-day experience, during which teams absorb knowledge, resources and programming ideas. The teams then return to their school systems to infuse these elements into a year-long health promotion program at the school.

The Maine School-Site Health Promotion Conference has successfully provided training since 1985. As a result of participation in the annual conference, schools have reported that they now have in-service wellness days for staff, and offer fitness activities, stress management workshops, weight management services, and smoking cessation programs, as well as adding healthy snack and juice machines, developing and implementing health-related school policies, advocating for and developing quality health education and physical education programs, and working toward a healthy physical and emotional school environment that includes positive, healthy role-modeling.

INDICATORS:

- A. School teams participate in the annual Maine School-Site Health Promotion Conference.
- B. In-service days are offered to provide opportunities for awareness and understanding of health promotion by teachers, administrators, and other school staff.
- C. Advocacy enables community health and social service professionals and family and community members to organize in support of the health promotion and wellness program.
- D. School personnel understand and demonstrate the importance, as well as the techniques, of modeling healthy behaviors.
- E. Youth are encouraged to participate actively in wellness activities and issues in ways that impact their behaviors and attitudes about their own health and well-being.

GUIDELINE 4: Support a healthy school climate and environment that include health promotion and education.

RATIONALE

School-site health promotion activities can provide a forum for discussion among school administrators, faculty and staff about organizational and worksite improvement. The school climate improves when students, staff and administrators share a concern for physical, social,

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mental and emotional health. In turn, a safe, healthy school environment supports health and learning. Schools need to be places where all feel cared for, supported, included, safe, and personally valued.

“At a time when the traditional structures of caring have deteriorated, schools must become places where teachers and students live together, talk to each other, take delight in each other’s company...children will work harder for people they love and trust” (Noddings, 1988). Research shows that a care-giving school environment can serve as a protective shield in reducing unhealthy behaviors and developing resilient youth. The psychological climate of the school fosters personal achievements and social growth. The physical surroundings in which faculty, staff and students are expected to work can also encourage healthy behaviors.

INDICATORS:

- A. The school involves students in promoting a safe and healthy school environment.
- B. The school empowers adults to serve as physically, socially and emotionally healthy role models.
- C. The school establishes high expectations and fosters high self-esteem for all.
- D. The school reinforces healthy behaviors of faculty, staff and students.
- E. The school creates a caring and supportive climate that nurtures students, staff and faculty.
- F. The school provides sites for a broad range of community health promotion programs.
- G. The school utilizes existing school or community facilities for health promotion and wellness-related activities.

GUIDELINE 5: Document the positive effects of a quality school-site health promotion program.

RATIONALE

School personnel are not the sole beneficiaries of school-site health promotion programs. Students, their families, and other community members reap significant rewards as well. Students benefit because their teachers are more energetic and have reduced absenteeism, school employees stay on staff longer, and the overall school climate is more optimistic.

Documented effects of health promotion programs on staff include increased energy levels, increased productivity, improved morale, decreased absenteeism and decreased teacher burnout. It has been documented that a health-promoting school climate is associated with improved academic performance (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, p. 9). Health promotion programs can have an important impact not only on health, but on organizational cost as well.

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INDICATORS:

- A. The health behavior and health status of school staff improve.
- B. Health care costs for school staff are reduced.
- C. The school exhibits lower rates of employee absenteeism.
- D. The school exhibits improvements in staff productivity and morale.
- E. The school seeks to link with local businesses in an effort to develop partnerships within the community.
- F. Organizational policies support a healthful work environment.
- G. The community supports and/or collaborates with the school in the areas of health promotion and wellness.

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