

## Featured Mental Health Initiative

### Be Well Employee Wellness Program

Medicine Hat Public School Division (Medicine Hat, AB)

#### Background

This initiative focuses on improving and maintaining the mental health of teachers and school staff who work within the Medicine Hat Public School Division (MHPSD). One of the five universal goals of the school division is to foster a culture of wellness. The school division understands that a healthy school community is one that supports the wellness of all of its members (students, teachers, staff, and parents) and strives to be a healthy setting for living, learning, and working. To support the goal of fostering a culture of wellness, the division has created an employee wellness program which is accessible to all staff employed with the division.

#### Promising Practice

The Be Well Employee Wellness Program is committed to providing tools, resources, supports, and initiatives that address the holistic needs of each individual employee. It recognizes that by focusing on multiple dimensions of wellness, employees can enhance their well-being.

The Be Well Employee Wellness Committee is made up of Wellness Champions who

collaborate to administer and support the wellness program. There is one Wellness Champion at each school in the division. They aim to ensure the health and wellness needs and goals of staff are being met. This includes identifying the initiatives and strategies needed to achieve staff health and wellness goals, coordinating the implementation of health and wellness initiatives across the school division, identifying potential barriers and proposing strategies to improve participation in the wellness program, and reviewing progress to evaluate program effectiveness. Some specific day-to-day tasks include updating and maintaining Employee Health and Wellness boards, obtaining information and feedback from colleagues to bring to the Wellness Committee, leading and collaborating with other Champions, presenting at staff meetings about workplace wellness, and attending Wellness Champion meetings throughout the school year.

The Committee meets early in the school year to identify the top wellness initiatives for the division based on the data from the spring employee wellness survey. A few initiatives that have been implemented include onsite influenza vaccinations for staff and their families, a Welcome Back BBQ, a division-wide book club and bowling tournament, providing improved access to mental health resources and supports for staff and their families, practicing better sleep and relaxation, mindfulness and meditation, and classes on conflict resolution, social emotional awareness, physical fitness, and nutrition.

#### Impact

Survey data indicated that the culture of wellness in MHPSD has increased 25% over the last couple of years. If the Wellness Program continues to thrive, then the culture within each school should shift to one that embraces a healthy, balanced approach to work. There will be a positive impact on students and their families as a result of increased health of staff. Individuals will have increased knowledge and access to the necessary tools to help them make healthier lifestyle choices and to adopt healthier



lifelong practices. Additionally, the sustained commitment and focus on health by school jurisdictions could attract new employees and increase retention of existing employees.

### **Sustainability**

Based on recent survey data, employees continued to want more support and information in regards to areas that impact their mental health. These include conflict resolution/management, social emotional awareness, mental health education and community supports, social connection with colleagues, information and tips on sleep and relaxation, and mindfulness and meditation training. To sustain the program, the Be Well Employee Wellness Committee will continue to develop initiatives for employees based on their requests to support and enhance their well-being.

### **Modifications**

Here are suggestions to modify this approach for different learning environments.

- Create events/initiatives that also involve student participation
- Create mental health workshops for adults and invite parents/guardians
- Incorporate ways employees from different schools can connect to expand their support network like signing up to meet for coffee on the weekend or go for walks in the evenings

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