



**ALBUQUERQUE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

APS Employee Wellness Interest Survey

A Summary Report

2007-2008

District Goal: Quality, Safe Schools

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Executive Summary

The New Mexico Public Education Department has issued specific requirements and guidance for a comprehensive school district wellness policy that helps create “a learning environment that allows students to achieve their full academic potential and enjoy lifelong health.” The Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) district wellness policy covers many aspects of wellness that include, but are not limited to, nutrition, health education, physical fitness, safety, and staff wellness. As a first step towards enhancing staff wellness, Research, Development and Accountability (RDA) conducted a survey to explore the APS employees’ interest in different types of information and activities that promote staff health and wellness.

About 2,800 employees throughout the district, or about 20% of all employees, were randomly selected to receive a survey. A total of 1,038 employees returned completed surveys, indicating a return rate of 37%. Most survey respondents were women and a good proportion were over 45 years old. Almost half the respondents were teachers while other well-represented categories were educational assistants, secretaries, and clerks in the district. Most respondents were either Anglo or Hispanic.

Results showed a substantial level of interest in having a workplace health and wellness program at APS. Over three-fourths of the respondents reported that a workplace wellness program would be helpful to them. Moreover, nearly half the respondents said either they had trouble following through with their chosen health behaviors or would like support with maintaining a healthy life style. The respondents’ age, gender, and preferences for wellness information and activities provide a guide for the future employee wellness plans.

Recommendations

The APS wellness policy procedural directives aim to promote the physical, emotional, and mental health of employees as well as prevent disease and disability, by providing opportunities for staff to learn and practice skills to make personal decisions about health-enhancing daily habits.

- Based on the employee interest in wellness information, a district-wide staff wellness newsletter incorporating health tips may be distributed on a regular basis via e-mail.
- A Health and Wellness website with health information and links to resources may be helpful in improving employee access to information.
- Respondents are interested in health and wellness educational sessions. The Health and Wellness Department, in partnership with other APS departments, may explore the possibility of enhancing district resources such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), or partner with community organizations or the APS health insurance provider, to bring in experts in the fields of nutrition, fitness, and stress management to present on high-interest topics.

- APS may pursue the goal of creating a wellness program that could be organized at all APS sites. The district School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) may assist in developing a wellness program by consolidating the lessons learned from the wellness programs in other school districts.

- APS employees are interested in fitness classes and individual fitness plans at their worksite.
 - The SHAC may explore the possibility of partnering with the community to coordinate offering these activities free or for a small fee.
 - This could also be achieved by negotiating to making local gym memberships more affordable for all employees.
 - School sites with fitness facilities could organize opportunities for staff to utilize the facilities before or after school.
 - Walking or running clubs could be organized at the site or cluster level, perhaps in collaboration with existing community walking/running clubs and races or events.

APS Employee Wellness Interest Survey 2007-2008

The New Mexico Public Education Department has issued the regulations and guidance for school districts to develop and implement a comprehensive district wellness policy that creates “a learning environment that allows students to achieve their full academic potential and enjoy lifelong health.”¹ The Albuquerque Public School District wellness policy covers many aspects of coordinated school health that include, but are not limited to, nutrition, health education, physical fitness, safety, and staff wellness. The APS district School Health Advisory Council’s (SHAC) staff wellness subcommittee, under the leadership of the APS Health and Wellness Department, has started implementing activities included in the staff wellness component of the wellness policy. As a first step towards enhancing staff wellness, the Health and Wellness Department requested the APS Employee Wellness Survey to explore APS employees’ interest in different types of information and activities to promote staff health and wellness. This report presents the results of the Spring 2008 APS Employee Wellness Interest Survey.

Employee Wellness and School-Based Employee Wellness Programs

Wellness can be defined as an intentional choice of a lifestyle characterized by personal responsibility, moderation, and maximum personal enhancement of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Worksite wellness program is an organized program intended to assist employees in making voluntary behavior changes which reduce their health and injury risks, improve their health consumer skills, and enhance their individual productivity and well-being.

Research shows that wellness programs contribute towards employees’ health in terms of improved eating habits, exercise, quitting smoking. In the school setting, when teachers participate in wellness activities, they are less stressed, more motivated, model healthy choices, and contribute to students’ success. When employee absenteeism decreases, school districts spend less on substitute teachers and health care costs. The following are examples of research findings about school-based wellness programs.

1. After participating in a 10-week health-promotion program for Dallas Independent School District employees that focused on exercise and physical fitness, 44% of teachers said they changed their overall lifestyle, 68% changed their diet, 26% who were initially sedentary started a regular program of vigorous exercise, and 18% quit smoking. A major benefit of the program for the school district included a reduction in absenteeism. The teachers who exercised had an average of 1.25 days less absenteeism than those who did not, which led to a savings of \$149,578 for the district in costs for substitute teachers (Blair et al 1984; 1986).²

2. In 2001, Washoe County School District in Nevada offered 11 different wellness programs to encourage school employees to engage in healthy lifestyles. Programs focused on brushing and flossing teeth, sensible eating during holidays, the importance of water, reducing TV time, getting adequate sleep, exercising for life, seatbelt safety, brain functioning, and fitness challenges. Results indicated that non-participants in the voluntary health programs had 20% higher rates of illness-related absenteeism compared to the employees who participated. A cost-

benefit analysis revealed that the district saved \$15.60 for every dollar spent on the wellness programs. The program saved the district \$2.5 million dollars in 2 years, and employees enjoyed dramatically improved health and quality of life, a situation in which employees and employer both benefited (Aldana et al 2005).³

Methods

RDA, in collaboration with the APS staff wellness subcommittee, developed and disseminated a three-page survey that asked employees to communicate their interest in the information and activities intended to promote employee health and wellness in the workplace. The respondents indicated their preference for the types of health information and methods of delivery (newsletters by e-mail or interoffice mail, workshops) and types of physical activities and other health related services, by making selections from many options.

About 2,800 employees throughout the district, or about 20% of all employees, were randomly selected to receive a survey. A total of 1,038 employees returned completed surveys, a return rate of 37%. The actual return rate might be slightly higher because many surveys did not reach the intended recipients as they were no longer at the location on file.

Respondent Demographics

Almost half the respondents (47%) were teachers while another 30% were either educational assistants, secretaries, or clerks in the district. A majority - almost 82% - of the respondents were women. Most respondents were either Anglo (59%) or Hispanic (35%). Over 60% of the respondents reported their age to be 45 or above.

Chart 1 - Current Position at APS

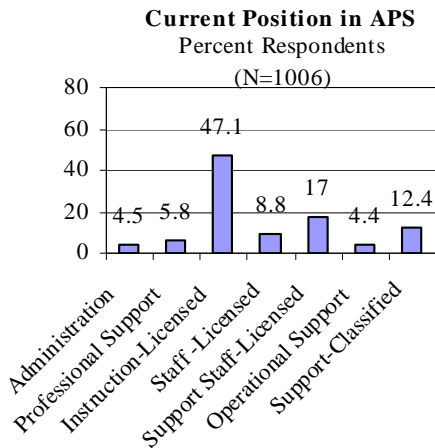


Chart 2 – Age Group

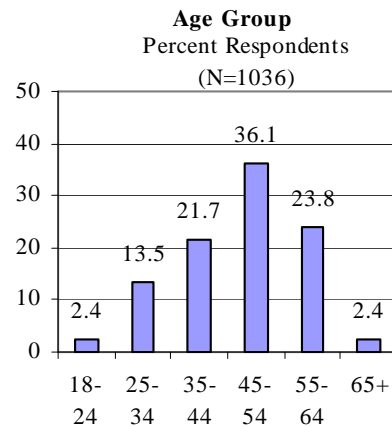


Chart 3 – Gender

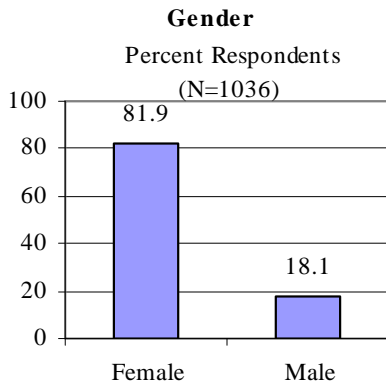
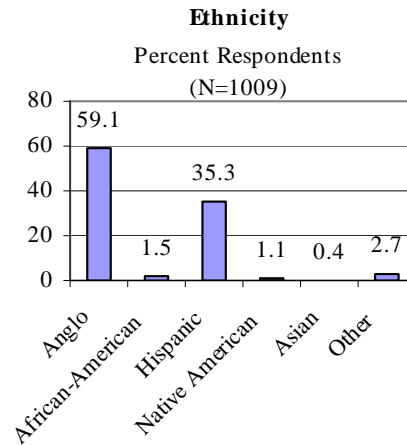


Chart 4 - Ethnicity



Findings

The following tables and charts summarize employees’ preferences regarding worksite health and wellness information and activities. While a fourth of the respondents said they did not feel the need for help with lifestyle or health behavior, an equal proportion of the respondents said they had trouble following through with the healthful changes they made (27%) or that they would like support maintaining a healthy life style (22%). (See Table 1)

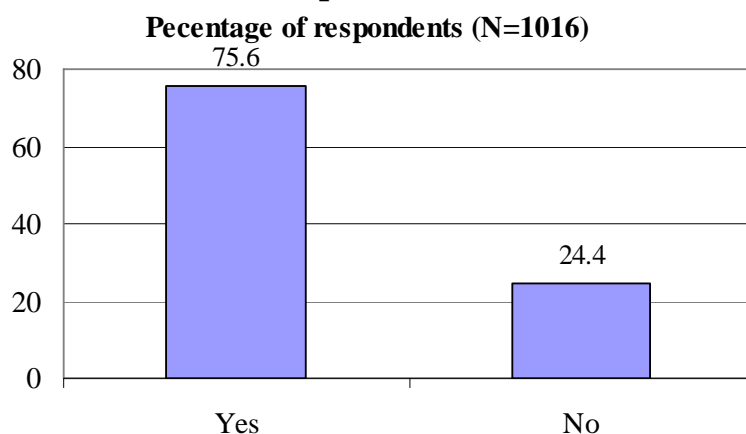
Table 1 - Respondents’ interest in health and wellness

The following describes my interest in health and wellness:	Percent agreed	Number of respondents
I do not feel the need for help with my lifestyle or health behavior.	26.0%	N=264
I have been thinking about changing some of my health behaviors.	16.2%	N=165
I am planning to make health behavior change in the next 30 days.	9.2%	N=93
I have made some health behavior changes but I still have trouble following through.	26.9%	N=273
I would like support maintaining my healthy lifestyle.	21.8%	N=221

As Chart 5 shows, most employees thought that a workplace wellness program would be beneficial; over 75% of the respondents agreed with the statement that a “workplace wellness program would be helpful” for them.

Chart 5 - Workplace Wellness Programs Helpful

"Workplace wellness program would be helpful to me"



Respondents indicated that there was very limited wellness support at their workplace. While one-third of the respondents said that they could find information on health topics or engage in some physical activity during break, only about one-tenth of the respondents said they were part of any organized physical fitness activity in the workplace. A small proportion – about one in eight employees – seemed to know whom to contact about personal health and wellness in APS. (See Table 2).

Table 2 - Wellness support in my work environment at present

Wellness Support in My Work Environment	Percent agreed	Number of respondents
I can find information on health topics.	38.4%	N=399
I receive information about health and wellness.	20.8%	N=216
I am able to walk or engage in other physical activity during the break.	36.1%	N=375
I am able to participate in organized wellness activities in my workplace. (e. g. an aerobics class, lunch ‘n learn sessions, fitness challenge, etc.)	11.6%	N=120
I know who to contact about personal health and wellness in APS.	12.3%	N=128

While almost half the respondents would like to get the health information via e-mail, one-third would like to get it in print. Respondents also said they would like to receive occasional expert lectures on health and wellness (See Table 3). A solid majority indicated they have access to the internet through work (88%) and home (77%). (Appendix A)

Table 3 - Preference in receiving health and wellness information

I prefer to receive health and wellness information in the following way/s.	Percent respondents	Number of respondents
Newsletters or tips via e-mail	48.7%	N=505
Occasional expert lectures on wellness	29.7%	N=308
Newsletters tips in print at work	34.5%	N=358
Staff or department meetings	16.1%	N=167
Not interested	15.4%	N=160

The next table represents the topics respondents most frequently selected as topics of interest about which they would like to receive information. Respondents could choose any number of topics from a list of topics. Table 4 below ranks the topics according to the frequency of preference shown.

Three most desired topics on which APS employees would like to receive written information are:

1. Nutrition/healthy cooking and eating
2. Physical activity/fitness
3. Stress management

About 14% of the respondents said they were not interested in receiving any health information.

Table 4 – “I would like to receive written information on the following topics.”

Preferences	Percent respondents	Number of respondents
Nutrition/healthy cooking & eating	46.3%	N=481
Physical activity/fitness	45.8%	N=475
Stress management	41.1%	N=427
Weight management	36.3%	N=377
Women’s health	35.3%	N=366
Vitamins and supplements	24.9%	N=258
Balancing work& life	22.4%	N=232
Health screenings	17.3%	N=180
Reducing cholesterol	15.4%	N=160
Issues of aging	15.3%	N=159
Prevention and health management	13.0%	N=135
Back care	12.3%	N=128
Men’s health	11.4%	N=118
Mental health	10.6%	N=110
Preventing workplace injuries	9.0%	N=93
None	14.3%	N=148

As Table 5 shows, respondents would prefer to participate in the following wellness activities, rank-ordered by frequency.

For the respondents, the three most desired wellness activities are:

1. Aerobics exercise classes
2. Personal fitness plan
3. Weight management program

About 18% said they are not interested in any of the activities proposed.

Table 5 – “I would like to participate in the following wellness activities on a regular basis.”

Preferences	Percent respondents	Number of respondents
Aerobic exercise classes	43.7%	N=454
Personal fitness plan	39.4%	N=409
Weight management program	38.3%	N=398
Walking event/club	37.0%	N=384
Cooking class/meal planning	28.4%	N=295
Financial management	15.9%	N=165
Confidential health screenings	14.8%	N=154
Health fair	14.6%	N=152
Fitness/wellness contest	14.3%	N=148
Workshops-health topics	12.0%	N=125
Balancing work & family	11.5%	N=119
None	17.6%	N=183

The following is a summary of other findings regarding employee preferences for a workplace health and wellness program:

- Almost two-thirds of the respondents said they would be interested in participating in a wellness program or workshop at the *worksite* as opposed to at the district or cluster level.
- About one-third of the respondents said their spouse or other family member would like to participate in a wellness program with them.
- When asked if they were willing to make a small contribution for the cost of a wellness program, about 10% of the survey respondents said “yes” to payroll deduction. About 46% said they would be willing to pay fees per activity, while about the same proportion declined to make any type of contribution for the cost of wellness program.

Discussion

School districts, much like any business, must pay for employee absenteeism, lost productivity, health care costs, workers’ compensation, and disability. A great deal of information is available regarding major health and mental health issues impacting the employees and resulting in steadily rising costs to the employers. It makes economic sense to explore preventive measures to promote employee health and wellness to help reduce employee absenteeism and improve productivity. For instance, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report indicates approximately two-thirds of all deaths in adults aged 25 years and older in the United States can be attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes (June 2006).⁴ However, the primary causes of these conditions are four preventable risk factors that can be addressed through a wellness program— tobacco use, poor eating habits, inadequate physical activity, and obesity.

Worksite wellness program is an organized program intended to assist employees in making voluntary behavior changes which reduce their health and injury risks, improve their health consumer skills, and enhance their individual productivity and well-being. Wellness can be defined as an intentional choice of a lifestyle characterized by personal responsibility, moderation, and maximum personal enhancement of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

Studies show that there are several benefits of employee wellness programs. Researchers have noted that wellness programs in school districts:

- promote healthful choices and reduce health risk behaviors of employees;
- decrease absenteeism;
- reduce workplace injuries;
- reduce the cost of healthcare and substitute teachers;
- help identify and correct conditions in the workplace that-
 - compromise the health of school employees,
 - impede student success,
 - contribute to escalating health care costs.

APS staff wellness directives aim to promote the physical, emotional, and mental health of employees as well as prevent disease and disability, by providing opportunities for staff to learn and practice skills to make personal decisions about health-enhancing daily habits.

Results of the staff survey revealed that most respondents were women and a good proportion were over 45 years old. Over three-fourths of the respondents said that a workplace wellness program would be helpful to them. Moreover, nearly half the respondents said either they had trouble following through with their health behavior or would like support for maintaining a healthy life style. The respondents' preferences for wellness information and activities combined with their demographics profile provide a guide for the future employee wellness plans.

Recommendations

- Based on the employee interest in wellness information, a district-wide staff wellness newsletter incorporating health tips may be distributed on a regular basis via e-mail.
- A Health and Wellness website with health information and links to resources may be helpful in improving employee access to information.
- Respondents are interested in health and wellness educational sessions. The Health and Wellness Department, in partnership with other APS departments, may explore the possibility of enhancing district resources such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or partner with community organizations, or the APS health insurance provider, to bring in experts in the fields of nutrition, fitness, stress management to present on high-interest topics.
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Appendix A

Table A - Internet Access

Home	77.2% (N=801)
Work	88.1% (N=914)
Elsewhere	10.7% (N=111)
Prefer not to participate	3.0% (N=31)

Table B - Willingness to make a contribution for the cost of a wellness program

Yes, through payroll deduction	9.5% (N=95)
Yes, fee per activity	45.7% (N=457)
No	44.7% (N=447)