

Healthy Employees, Healthy Bottom Line:

Loudoun County Public Schools Engages Employees to Take Charge of Their Health

By C. Sue Hurd and Thomas Martel¹

Many school districts are seeking to relieve the increasing burden of health care costs by encouraging healthy lifestyles among employees. Loudoun County Public Schools and CIGNA HealthCare have together developed a series of programs that successfully engage harried employees to increase exercise levels, lower r stress, and help take greater control of their health. The anticipated end result: healthy behaviors that improve the health of employees.

We believe our success is a result of best practices – far beyond the “wellness” brochure that may get shoved in a drawer.

Our approach begins with in-depth research that assesses the Loudoun County Schools’ medical claims history, health risk factors, and ability of employees to participate in wellness programs. The administration of health benefits can be compared to our experience in the field of education: timely, targeted research can bring a deeper understanding of the nature of the problems a group faces, and insight into how to best meet those challenges.

To create the School Board’s health program, the Loudoun County Public Schools relied on CIGNA Health Education Coordinator, who has extensive experience managing community health programs and Masters Degrees in health and behavior studies.

Instead of launching into a “one-size fits all” wellness program, the Health Education Coordinator began working with the Loudoun County Public Schools Employee Benefits staff in the fall of 2005 to collect pertinent data to identify the most critical needs of the enrollees. This included analysis of the groups’ lifestyle issues, employee surveys, a claims history review, environmental factors, and a review of local demographic data. In addition, the Health Education Coordinator visited the school work sites to learn about the physical conditions of different buildings, what kind of food was available for employees and what opportunities they had for exercise.

The analysis showed that employees were at risk for diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol and stress, and required interventions that would motivate our people to exercise more, manage their stress, and get more preventive screenings. The readiness among the Loudoun County Public Schools employees to make changes to improve their health was remarkable. Armed with these findings, the School Board began the following programs:

- *Your Best Life Challenge*: An employee needs-based education program to identify the appropriate lifestyle management programs available under their

- health plan, including stress management, weight management, and smoking cessation. These modules are available both online and at home.
- *Wellness Wednesday Workshops*: On-site, monthly classes covering a wide range of health topics, which host up to 25 attendees. Classes are routinely full.
 - *Worksite Wellness Challenge*: We had tremendous success in promoting participation in the Health Risk Assessment (HRA) process. More than 70 trained worksite staff volunteers, called “Wellness Ambassadors,” encouraged employees to complete their HRA. We capitalized on the natural competition between schools, and offered the five worksites with the highest percentage of received a month of Wellness experiences, activities and education. As a result, nearly 1000 employees completed a Health Risk Assessment in a two-month period of time and the data collected resulted in a series of clear goals and objectives for the LCPS employees.
 - *Wellness Corner*: A tool on the Loudoun County Public Schools Web site allows employees to view upcoming activities and view local exercise class information. CIGNA created “Nuestra Sanos,” (“Our Health”) a companion site in Spanish.
 - *Personal Wellness Challenges -Incentives for Preventative Screening*: Analysis revealed missing health screenings was a major issue for employees. To address this issue an incentive program was created offering \$120 in credit to employees’ health plan flexible spending accounts for completing five key screenings including: cholesterol and glucose testing, mammograms and colon cancer screenings. More than 500 employees earned the credit by getting the screenings the first year.
 - *Onsite Early Detection*: Onsite Cholesterol, Blood Pressure and Glucose screenings. Vision and hearing mobile exams and flu shots were offered.
 - *Club Mom*: a prenatal support group lead by peers, providing local resources for expectant parents and educational workshops facilitated by local providers.
 - *¡Buena Salud!* Good Health Communications providing emails and links on the Loudoun County Public Schools Web site. Helping our bilingual employees by listing important community health resources.

In all, more than 1,500 employees have participated thus far in the first year of these new wellness programs, and we hope to expand our wellness offering for next year.

We have accomplished a great deal this past year, and we have received wonderful feedback on the impact of our activities this year. We are eager to continue this successful partnership of employer and health care provider to offer employee-focused wellness solutions to the employees of Loudoun County Public Schools.

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