

Incentivizing Physical Exercise

Given the busy schedules of educators and school staff, it can be difficult to find time to be physically active. However, physical activity has been shown to not only improve overall health and longevity, but to reduce stress, assist in emotional regulation and improvements in mood, and act as a protective barrier against depression and anxiety (Sharma et al., 2006). For school employees, improvements in health are associated with greater job satisfaction and increased productivity, as well as decreased absenteeism (NACDD, 2018). When school teachers and employees are more physically active, they can model healthy habits and behaviors for their students, which in turn improves student health and academic outcomes (NACDD, 2018). Because physical activity is so integral to wellbeing, many employers and school districts have begun implementing physical activity incentives. Some districts provide cash bonuses or other rewards such as health insurance discounts, for a certain level of physical activity reported (such as utilizing a fitness center multiple times a month or reaching a certain number of daily steps)(Davis School District, n.d.). These incentives have proven to be particularly beneficial at increasing physical activity especially among those you previously had low levels of physical activity(Crespin et al., 2015). If you are interested in improving or implementing an employee wellness program, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2020) has provided a wealth of resources and evidence-based tools to assist school leaders in developing an employee wellness program.

Materials:	Varies
Duration:	Ideally a few months to a full school year
Implementation:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determine what level of physical activity you hope employees can achieve and how it will be measured (number of daily/monthly steps, visits to a fitness center, number of minutes daily, etc.) 2. Create a way for employees to report their physical activity (Google Form, spreadsheet, app, etc.) 3. Determine what incentive you will provide (cash bonus/voucher, gift cards, health insurance discounts, etc. 4. Introduce the activity to your school or district staff.

Does it work?

A study was completed at the University of Minnesota assessing the impact of a Fitness Rewards Program (FRP) on university employees' self-reported exercise (Crespin et al., 2015). For the rewards program, employees enrolled in the university's health insurance plan could receive a \$20 credit each month if they utilized a fitness center at least eight times during the month. Employees who completed an annual Health Risk Assessment (HRA) were offered an additional \$65. The sample included about 3,000 employees, of which about 35% enrolled in the FRP. Fitness levels improved somewhat across all participants, but it was found that the greatest improvement in fitness levels was among participants who had low levels of participation in fitness activity prior to enrolling in the program (Crespin et al., 2015).

References:

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ADDRESSING
WELLBEING
IN SCHOOLS

*An Educator's Practical Guide to Improving
Wellbeing*

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DAVID BOREN



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