

Preparing Teachers and School Leaders to Better Address School Health and Wellness

Professional development provides an excellent method of ensuring that teachers and staff understand how to integrate health and wellness into their interactions with students. As the adults who spend the most waking hours with children during the week, school staff deeply understand how important it is that they are equipped to look out for the health and safety of their students. A recent study showed that elementary school teachers are already spending about 180 hours per school year addressing student health issues.^{13,14} Additionally, a recent survey showed that teachers and principals value social emotional learning but close to half have not received training or professional development on the subject.¹⁵

In addition, building an effective schoolwide environment that promotes health and wellness requires prioritizing the health and wellness of teachers, principals and other school staff. According to a [report](#) from Pennsylvania State University and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, “elementary school teachers who have greater stress and show more symptoms of depression create classroom environments that are less conducive to learning, which leads to poor academic performance among students.” Effects of teacher stress range from lower scores on math tests, to more behavior problems and lower levels of social adjustment and student engagement.¹⁶

Creating and maintaining positive working environments is critical for teacher retention and productivity. High stress and poor working

environments lead many teachers out of the profession, and turnover is most likely to occur in poorly performing schools. This contributes to a long-term destabilization of low-income neighborhood schools and deepens existing inequities in the school system.

Best Practices

- SEAs consider integrating health and wellness into preservice training and certification requirements for teachers and administrators.
- SEAs create standardized training and professional development tools to connect educators with evidence-based strategies, curriculum, and resources.
- LEAs develop or support training opportunities to build knowledge of and expertise in issues related to student health and well-being, including understanding and applying data for improvement.
- SEAs and LEAs work collaboratively with partners, and consider how to leverage relationships with other agencies and organizations to address interconnected and interdependent social determinants of health and education.
- LEAs create wellness programs to connect staff to stress reduction and health promotion support.

Resources

The CDC Healthy Schools project has a variety of [professional development resources](#). CASEL has developed [guidance](#) for states interested in developing a high-quality professional learning system for SEL.

¹³Hill, N. J., & Hollis, M. (2011). Teacher time spent on student health issues and school nurse presence. *Journal of School Nursing*, 28(3), 181.

¹⁴Baisch, M. J., Lundeen, S. P., & Murphy, M. K. (2011). Evidence-based research on the value of school nurses in an urban school system. *Journal of School Health*, 81, 74-80.

¹⁵Hamilton L, Doss C, Steiner E. Teacher and Principal Perspectives on Social Emotional Learning in America’s Schools. Findings from the American Educator Panels. 2019. Rand Corporation: Santa Monica, CA. Available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2991.html. Accessed on June 6, 2019.

¹⁶Greenberg, M. T., Brown J. L., Abenavoli, R.M. (2016). “Teacher Stress and Health Effects on Teachers, Students, and Schools.” Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University

State Spotlight: Florida

The Florida Department of Education offers an in-person professional development opportunity for up to 200 state educators, the [Healthy Schools Summer Academy](#). Designed specifically for health education and physical education content teachers and administrators, with special emphasis on other subject area courses with integrated health education benchmarks, all educators are welcomed. Academy sessions include information and resources focusing on Florida standards, safe and supportive environments, school connectedness, nutrition, tobacco prevention education, physical education assessments, and using the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).

State Spotlight: North Carolina

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction engages LEAs in evidence-based practices of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework and the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model. North Carolina has legislation supportive of safe school environments inclusive of strategies to address student academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs. Through provision of professional development, resources, guidance, technical assistance and collaboration, staff of the NCDPI help LEAs with the implementation of practices aligned with this legislation with an ultimate goal of healthy, safe, and responsible students. For example, NCDPI has created [online professional development training modules](#) to provide educators the tools to improve students' academic performance, raise awareness of how to address behavioral health issues inside and outside the classroom, and foster communication among schools, students, families, law enforcement, and communities.