



Jefferson County's Steps Program

Promoting healthy behaviors among school employees

What is the public health problem?

Chronic diseases related to unhealthy lifestyle behaviors concern both the public health community and school officials in Jefferson County.

- Among Jefferson County residents, only about 25% reported eating five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, according to 2006* Steps Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data.
- About 40% reported being physically inactive.
- Nearly 8% reported having diabetes, about 38% reported being overweight, and nearly 25% reported being obese.

How Steps is responding

The Steps Program helped implement a school wellness program for the school staff to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity behaviors.

- Jefferson County's Steps Program helped a rural school district set up a School Health Advisory Committee and develop an action plan for schools. After implementing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *School Health Index* (SHI)[†], staff wellness was identified as an area in need of improvement.

- Health promotion activities such as after-hours walking groups and classes on proper nutrition were conducted over a 2-year period.

What is the impact?

- 105 district staff members have participated and lost a total of 430 pounds.
- Expenditures by the district's self-funded health care plan decreased, resulting in a reduction in employees' health care insurance premiums. In fact, the Board of Education was able to waive one month of insurance premiums for everyone, totaling almost \$300,000 in savings.

Why this program is working

The SHI, developed by CDC, is a self-assessment tool that includes research-based guidelines for school health programs. Evidence has shown that it is an effective tool in establishing the policies and practices needed to improve health-related behaviors of young people and school staff members. In addition, studies indicate that comprehensive work-site health programs focused on lifestyle behavior change lead to improvements in health behaviors among employees and a return on investment for employers.

* Most recent data available

[†] <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/shi/default.aspx>