Schools, like other employers, are searching for ways to reduce costs associated with health care and absenteeism:

- Healthcare costs in the U.S. continue to rise. The estimated cost in 2003 was $1.66 trillion. ¹
- Much of the cost is associated with the diagnosis and treatment of the following chronic disease: heart disease, stroke, obesity and diabetes. ¹
- Heart disease and stroke, the #1 and #3 leading causes of death, cost the nation approximately $300 billion/year. ¹
- Diabetes costs the US approximately $132 billion/year. Individuals with diabetes lost more than 8 days /year from work. ¹

Health promotion and disease management programs in the worksite are cost effective.

The return on investment for worksite programs have benefit-to-cost ratios ranging from $1.49 to $4.91 (median of $3.14) in benefits for every dollar spent on the program. ¹

The major root causes of all chronic disease are the health debilitating behaviors (poor nutrition, sedentary lifestyle and tobacco use).

Worksite programs help employees:

- control weight, ²⁻³
- reduce blood pressure, ⁴
- stop smoking, ⁵⁻⁶
- increase physical activity ⁷⁻⁸ and
- manage emotional stress. ⁹

School Site Health Promotion Provides Both Public Health and Educational Benefits for Staff.

The rationale for organizing worksite health promotion in schools is compelling:

- Schools have both the needed facilities and the potential staff to provide the program.
- Support from co-workers facilitates the adoption health enhancing behaviors. ¹⁰
- Disease, health risks and injury are reduced thus reducing absenteeism and lowering health care costs. ¹¹
- Job satisfaction and employee morale are increased. ¹¹

References


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Schools that implement a school site health promotion program will also realize educational benefits for students:

- Reduced absenteeism, which saves money and increases productivity, will improve instruction as students’ primary teachers are not replaced by temporary substitutes.
- Teachers who participate in worksite health promotion programs are more energetic and can use this extra energy within their classrooms.
- Improved morale that results when health promotion programs are implemented makes the entire school climate more positive. A supportive, respectful school climate has been associated with increased student achievement. Teachers who experience the school as a community try to provide a parallel experience for their students.
- Having teachers as role models for healthy choice promotes healthy behaviors among students, as students see their teachers implementing the health lessons they are teaching.

The components of a school site health promotion program should be designed to promote physical, emotional and mental health, as well as prevent disease and disability.

School site programming can be separated into four broad categories:

- **Screening and Assessment** (blood pressure, fitness, cholesterol, computerized health risk appraisals, cancer);
- **Risk Factor Reduction Education** (classes on exercise and physical fitness, smoking cessation, stress management, weight management, alcohol and other drug use prevention);
- **Organizational Policies and Environmental Change** (smoking prohibition, payment of wellness days for lack of absenteeism, construction of fitness trails/pars cours); and
- **Employee Assistance Programs**.

There are a variety of community resources that could be used in the schools to focus on health promotion. In addition to using school staff to provide programming, every community has public health workers and voluntary health workers (e.g. American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, the American Lung Association, etc.), and hospitals whose employees have a responsibility for community outreach. Many of these agencies have developed worksite health promotion programs that they are willing to share.

**Engaging school staff most in need of services.** Ensuring that those school staff most in need of the program actually participate in provided programs is critically important if schools are to realize the total financial, health and educational benefits. This participation can be facilitated through targeted marketing, as well as through linking health care benefits to participation in health promotion programming. Further, high-risk individuals may need personal or telephone counseling by a personal health trainer to encourage initial and continued participation. This could be part of the responsibility of the Schoolsite Health Promotion Coordinator or a partner at public health and/or voluntary agency who is promoting worksite wellness programming.