

**Employee Wellness: The CT WSCC Partnership On-Demand Webinar Series Transcript**

Welcome to the employee wellness on-demand webinar. There are 10 webinars in this series, each corresponding with one domain of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model. This webinar will focus on the employee wellness domain. Each webinar will begin with an overview of the WSCC model and an introduction to our practice briefs before a deep dive into the WSCC domain of focus.

The CT WSCC Partnership is a joint collaboration between the University of Connecticut’s Collaboratory on School and Child Health and the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health. Before we begin, we want to acknowledge our funding partners and share that the content of this webinar does not necessarily reflect the official views of the CDC or the Department of Health and Human Services.

Our practice briefs draw on the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model, which is the CDC and ASCD’s framework for addressing health in schools. The model is student-centered and stresses the need to coordinate policy, processes, and practice across ten domains of student health and well-being to maximize student success. As can be seen in the outmost ring, the model is situated within the community and emphasizes drawing upon community context and expertise to use the model in contextually-aligned ways. The model is not a prescriptive program. Instead, it is a framework for organizing a school or district’s efforts to support the whole child, facilitate high-quality teaching, and maximize student learning and success.

Today's content comes from our WSCC Practice Brief series. These are freely available on our website at ctwscc.org. If you'd like to learn more about how these briefs were developed and our CDC-funded project, please watch our "Intro to the WSCC Webinar Series" video.

What is employee wellness?

Employee wellness focuses on the health and well-being of not only teacher, but all school personnel and students. A comprehensive approach to employee wellness includes both prevention and intervention activities, like physical activity, and stress management resources. Let’s hear what some of our community partners have done to improve employee wellness in their communities.

Some examples of employee wellness efforts is providing employees with affordable health plans, providing employee assistance programs, opportunities for people to actually take their paid time off, breaks during the day. All of those types of things are good examples. Also, providing people with some opportunities for either fitness education or nutrition education courses, things like that, that can just improve your general wellness and health.

So, why is employee wellness relevant to child outcomes?

When educators are well supported, they have more energy, they are more engaged, they’re, they have better attendance, so they’re at work and able to do the job that they’re supposed to do. Ultimately when our educators are modeling wellness, that trickles down to our students. And it’s a continuous process. It’s not something that you do once and it goes away, but it’s constantly paying attention to wellness of the entire school community. For the employees that are at the top and what they’re modeling really sets the tone for the rest of the school community.

Now that we know the why behind employee wellness, let’s look at some evidence-based strategies that you can use in your practice.

The strategies are organized by required resource demand to help you choose appropriate initiatives for your setting.

We begin with strategies that require a low resource demand. The first is to establish an employee wellness committee. The employee wellness committee should solicit employee input across positions to ensure that activities match interests and meet health-related needs. The committee can encourage participation by disseminating information about available programming to all employees. The committee can also work at the organizational level to proactively identify and respond to common workplace stressors that are associated with improved physical and mental health. Schools can refer to the research to identify common workplace stressors and do an audit of current wellness activities.

Another low resource demand strategy is to support a positive workplace climate. School climate and culture impact not only student outcomes but also employee outcomes such as burnout, job satisfaction, and commitment to position. School administrators can implement supports such as professional learning communities, which can foster collaboration and connection in staff, and provide professional learning about critical topics like stress and social responsiveness.

Next, we move into moderate resource demand strategies. The first recommendation is to implement environmental changes to support healthy lifestyle habits.

Changes to the school environment can also support employee health. These changes include access to free drinking water, healthy food and beverage options in the cafeteria and vending machines, opportunities for physical activity breaks, and policy changes. An example of a policy change would be instituting a healthy meetings policy for staff.

A second moderate resource strategy is to encourage participation in online health and wellness promotion. School leadership can share online opportunities to access health education, health and wellness monitoring tools, and social networks to support health behavior changes. Research has shown that online wellness interventions are not only effective in promoting educators’ cardiovascular health, but also improved mental health outcomes.

Next, we transition to the most resource-intensive strategies. Schools can provide employees with supports to prevent and respond to their mental health needs. Mental health supports can look like mindfulness interventions, resilience training, workplace stress management programs, and individualized treatment for needs such as depression or anxiety. Districts might also have Employee Assistance Programs that can assist with referrals to external providers for individualized treatment. It’s important that these supports are designed and implemented in a way that is relevant to the setting.

Our second high-resource strategy is to provide coaching and ongoing professional learning to employees. Teacher stress is highly prevalent and is associated with poor mental health outcomes and turnover. Many teachers report that their greatest concern is responding to student social, emotional, and behavioral needs. School leaders can provide coaching and professional development related to identified areas of need to facilitate better implementation of strategies and reduce teacher stress. These areas of need may include classroom climate and engagement or teaching strategies to meet diverse student needs. These efforts should include specific attention to addressing challenges faced by newer teachers.

If you are interested in learning about additional resources related to the employee wellness domain of the WSCC model, please see the full employee wellness WSCC practice brief.

This brief, among the others, can be found on the Tools page of our website: ctwscc.org. After clicking on our tools, scroll down to Best WSCC practices. Here you will find our practice briefs.

Thank you for joining us! We hope you enjoyed today’s webinar. To view the other webinars in our WSCC on-demand webinar series, please visit our website at ctwscc.org. If you have any questions about the Connecticut WSCC Partnership, please feel free to contact us at ctwscc@uconn.edu.