



## **WHOLE SCHOOL, WHOLE COMMUNITY, WHOLE CHILD (WSCC) SCHOOL HEALTH NJ PROJECT**

### **BUILDING AND SUSTAINING HEALTHY SCHOOLS FOR ALL STUDENTS**

### **THREE (3) STEPS TO ENGAGE PARENTS ON THE HEALTH & WELLNESS (H&W) TEAM**

#### **INTRODUCTION**



Parents play an important role in supporting their children's health and learning at school. When parents are engaged in their children's school activities, their children get better grades, choose healthier behaviors, and have better social skills. Parent engagement also makes it more likely that their teens will avoid unhealthy behaviors, such as sexual risk behaviors and tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use.

Research also shows that school health activities are more successful when parents are involved. For example, when parents volunteer at their children's school, their children are less likely to start smoking and more likely to get enough physical activity. Engaging parents as advocates for healthy schools is also common sense. Parents have political clout as residents and taxpayers to advocate for positive change on behalf of their child's school before school boards and municipal councils.

Follow the three easy steps below to successfully recruit and keep parents on your H&W Team. Note that these steps are also useful for recruiting youth, community and/or any other non-staff Team members.



#### **STEP 1: "TAKE 5" (MINUTES) TO FIRST EXAMINE YOUR TEAM'S FEELINGS AND/OR BELIEFS ABOUT ENGAGING PARENTS**

A. What feelings or beliefs do your STAFF team members have about parents participating on the H&W Team?

1. Name 3 positive feelings and/or beliefs.
  - a. What makes them positive?
  - b. Discuss why parents are valuable team members.
2. Name 3 negative feelings and/or beliefs

- a. What makes them negative?
- b. What could make the negative a positive?

B. What action(s) can your Team take to enhance parent engagement in your school?

Examples:

1. Provide a welcoming environment by greeting parents when they enter the school.
2. Create ongoing and positive communication using a newsletter or weekly email.
3. Share health tips or health information from the school nurse.



## STEP 2: PREPARING FOR PARENTS TO JOIN THE H&W TEAM

A. Create a brief “elevator speech” to use when inviting parents (or others) in person or by email. The elevator speech might sound something like this:

*We would like you and several interested parents to join a new Health & Wellness Team. We have received a very important grant from the NJ DOH. The goal of this grant is to have a healthier school environment and healthier students. We are excited about the grant because we know that improving health will make a difference in the academic and life success of our students. Parents are an important part of this effort and we invite you to join us on [date] at [time] for a 45-minute meeting. We will review the grant and describe responsibilities for the Health & Wellness Team. We would like you to be part of this team. Childcare is available. Will you join us?*

B. Where are the opportunities for recruiting middle- and high-school parents? Look for parents you would like to work with or who you believe would be interested in working with the Team to promote health in the school:

1. Is there a parent/s currently supporting your efforts to make your school a healthier place? How are they doing this?
2. Is there a parent/s with the interest or passion to work on behalf of all students in the school, not just their own child(ren)?
3. Has any parent approached you or the school regarding a health issue or concern, either positive or negative? Turn their concern(s) into action by asking them to join your Team to make positive changes for school health.
4. Ask school staff for recommendations:
  - a. School professionals: Nurse, Counselor(s), PE/Health teacher(s), Athletic Director
  - b. Secretaries, custodians, aides, crossing guards
  - c. PTA/PTO parents or parents on the BOE or other advisory groups
  - d. Booster Club parents who might be interested in including health as a part of the work they are already doing. For example:
    - i. Sports booster clubs could provide healthy snacks.
    - ii. Parents of theater students could ensure that their kids get enough sleep and they can be mindful of after-parties.

5. Ask students to recommend their parents. Students know what their parents are interested in and what is discussed at home.

### C. Secure parent engagement.

1. Ask parents the best way to contact them: text, phone call, email.
2. Invite 3-5 parents to an upcoming H&W Team meeting designed to welcome parents. Reaching out to 3-5 parents helps ensure having at least two parents at the meeting.
3. If parents are interested in attending the H&W Team meeting, send out a confirmation email ASAP with the date, time, place and agenda. Ask parents to confirm their attendance (to know who will be at the meeting).
4. If parents are interested but cannot attend, thank them and let them know you'll invite them to future meetings.



## STEP 3: FIRST H&W TEAM MEETING WITH PARENTS PRESENT

Ensure that the first H&W Team meeting that parents are invited to has been scheduled at a time convenient for your staff and, as best as you can, when you believe that at least some parents will be available.

### A. Set the Stage

Remember that the school is *your* environment, not theirs. Initially, parents may feel uncomfortable. Help parents feel more comfortable by considering these ideas:

1. Have comfortable chairs and a table in a room with natural light, if possible.
2. Offer a healthy snack such as fruit, yogurt and water to drink.
3. Be respectful of time: start and end on time.

### B. Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome
  - a. Have all staff and parent members introduce themselves and state why they feel health is important to student life and academic success.
  - b. To make them feel welcome, discuss why parents are valuable.
  - c. Ask parents (and staff) if they are interested in one particular aspect of health - emotional, mental, physical or social.
  - d. Ask parents (and staff) to mention one area in the school they know about that supports health and one thing that could be improved or is missing.
2. Distribute and review agenda
  - a. Briefly describe the grant: goal(s) and activities and provide a brief written description or a copy of the School Health Improvement Plan (SHIP), if the school has a Plan.
  - b. Ask parents what grant activity(ies) interest them. Encourage them to give input and ask questions regarding the grant activities.

3. Provide and review handout: Team Member Qualities and Activities. This handout provides parents with the expectations and responsibilities of being a team member.
  - a. Meeting time - Can the Team meet at a time convenient for parents? What times are good for parents? If the Team rotates times, is this good or more convenient for parents?
  - b. Is having parents join via conference call or internet (skype) an option?
  - c. Provide parents with a staff name, phone number and email to contact when they're unable to attend a meeting.
  - d. Outreach to other parents – parents can be the “voice” of health & wellness in the school community; for example, sharing information at PTA meetings.

C. Post-meeting follow-up with parents:

1. Text or email thank you with next meeting date, time and location.
2. Email minutes before next meeting date.
3. Email agenda for the next meeting.