

SUCCESS STORIES

by: Marcia Middleton

School Programs Support Youth Health

SUMMARY

Youth in the Rochester City School District have higher obesity rates and poorer health habits than other local youth. Students in this high-needs district also have more social challenges. To meet the needs of these at-risk teens, innovative health initiatives have been launched to support youth health by increasing access to prevention programs and treatment services right at school. Initiatives include student wellness and telemedicine programs, school-based health centers, and school-specific community health partnerships.



CHALLENGE

Students in Rochester, NY, face significant health and social challenges. Obesity rates and poor health habits are grave concerns in the City of Rochester. Data from the University of Rochester Medical Center show that about 44% of 12-18 year olds are overweight or obese in the city, compared to 26% in the suburbs. Also, 9th-12th graders in the Rochester City School District (RCSD) are more likely to have unhealthy habits, such as drinking two or more regular

sodas each day and being active for less than an hour per day. There are alarming social concerns among large numbers of RCSD students. Many live in poverty, qualify for free- or reduced-price meals, have special needs, or have witnessed violence in their neighborhoods and homes. In this high-needs District, recent layoffs of staff involved in traditional student wellness activities could result in further declines in youth health.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

How can you help to improve youth health in the RCSD?

- 1. Join your School Wellness Team: These teams need more parents and staff to help generate good ideas for school wellness programs and to roll them out.**
- 2. Be well informed: Find out what health initiatives are available in your school and encourage youth to participate in them.**
- 3. Support youth health: Create healthy school and home environments and be a positive role model.**

"At our school, we launched 'The Biggest Winner' contest in January, when people were making New Year's resolutions to get healthier and lose weight. The program was very successful with students and staff!"

- David Michelsen, Wellness Champion, School of the Arts

SOLUTION

Schools in the Rochester City School District (RCSD) have become convenient venues for delivering new wellness programs and services to urban youth. Innovative Coordinated School Health (CSH) programs make healthy choices easier for both students and staff. CSH programs are supported by HEART--Health Engagement and Action for Rochester's Transformation--through a community transformation grant. New initiatives have also been launched to increase student access to treatment, e.g., telemedicine programs, health centers in eight schools, and school-specific community health partnerships.

RESULTS

- CSH programs for students and staff at the School of the Arts (SOTA): From January-May 2013, 45 participants completed "The Biggest Winner" contest, with 5-10 pound losses. A weight lifting club and Corporate Challenge helped improve fitness levels.
- Health-e-Access in the RCSD: This telemedicine program, operated by the University of Rochester Medical Center, allows students to see their health-care provider without leaving school, via a video/computer network, which reduces costly emergency-room visits.
- The School-Based Health Center (SBHC) at East High School: This University of Rochester School of Nursing SBHC provides medical and mental health services for enrolled students. Outcomes include improved treatment for asthma attacks and counselling interventions to manage stress related to exposure to violence.

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FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Dave Michelsen, SOTA's Wellness Champion and Athletic Director, says that one area of challenge at his school is the lack of outdoor facilities for physical activity. To solve this dilemma, the Physical Education and Health Department will explore nearby community facilities that can be used to keep their students active, such as YMCAs, rock climbing facilities, and skating rinks. Since winter can be the toughest time of year for people to engage in physical activity, Mr. Michelsen hopes to share fun ideas for staying active in cold weather with students and staff at SOTA.

A new coordinator is being hired to bring Health-e-Access on-line in all District schools and a promotional campaign will soon be launched to expand this initiative.