



Champions for bringing healthy choices to life.

A CASE REPORT:

LEBANON SCHOOL DISTRICT



THE PROBLEM

A comprehensive community health needs assessment conducted by Penn State Hershey Medical Center indicated specific health needs in the Lebanon County community. This information, coupled with a widely known fact that health screenings for school students is a huge burden for school nurses, led Penn State Hershey PRO Wellness Center and nurse management teams to develop a plan to help.

Various data sources detailed the difficulties facing this community. Assessment data revealed this county had vulnerabilities when compared to other counties in Pennsylvania; higher rates of children living in single parent households and poverty, obesity, smoking, teen births, uninsured families and lower proportions of primary care physicians and dentists were reported. School district data indicated a high level of financial need with 80% of the 4,850 students confronting financial difficulties in their home environment. In addition, the Pennsylvania Department of Health statistics indicate that 31% of the county's students in kindergarten through 6th grade were overweight or obese, and students in 7th through 12th grade 35% were obese.

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Conversations with school nurses and administrators revealed that it typically takes school nurses four months to conduct health screenings. Time spent for screenings takes nurses away from acute health needs faced by students during a typical school day. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Article XIV of the Pennsylvania School Code requires health assessments. Assessments are conducted annually in public schools and results are reported to the state and parents. Pennsylvania is one of only a handful of states that requires annual assessments.

THE SOLUTION

Over one hundred nurses from Penn State Hershey Medical Center, along with eight personnel from Penn State Hershey PRO Wellness Center, partnered with twelve school nurses from seven schools in the county to complete 3,105 screenings that included vision, hearing, height, weight and scoliosis evaluations. The health screenings were conducted using teams of nurses, during one school day per building, with students visiting a "station" for each screening test conducted. Data of assessment results were entered electronically during each screening day and parent letters were generated. The health assessments identified children who were overweight or obese, were in need of glasses, needed follow up hearing evaluations and had the diagnosis of scoliosis.

The school superintendent noted the importance of screenings, especially for vision and hearing, stating

"If a student needs vision or hearing assistance, those things are critical to get support with because they impede academic progress."

The outreach coordinator echoed the superintendent's comments by saying that families without access to affordable healthcare rely on schools as

"an important source of health screenings and information, especially for children of low income families."

THE RESULTS

A significant health finding was that in this school district, childhood obesity was above national levels and higher than anticipated by the Department of Health baseline data. Screenings indicated 41.48% of students were found to be overweight or obese. This data, coupled with original assessment results, has led to follow-up evaluations, planning and actions between Penn State Hershey PRO Wellness Center and school district administrators. Examples include conducting school environmental health assessments at the school building level and goal setting to improve areas in need of attention, such as improved walking routes to schools. Penn State Hershey PRO Wellness Center is committed to helping improve the health of Lebanon school district students and will continue its partnership with the schools to increase physical activity opportunities and healthy food choices.

This school health-screening model was very well received by the school district and other school districts have requested assistance from Penn State Hershey nurses to conduct screenings in their schools. This type of screening, conducted early in school year, allows for corrective actions in a timely manner and allows school nurses to focus on direct care for students during the school year. The nursing team plans to return to the school district for the 2013/2014 school year to complete assessments for students. To improve the process, medical and nursing students will join the nurse team to increase the work force.

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ABOUT PENN STATE HERSHEY PRO WELLNESS CENTER

Penn State Hershey PRO Wellness Center helps Pennsylvania communities live healthier lives using evidence-based strategies for measurable and sustainable results. Historically focused on childhood obesity prevention, the Center has helped children and their families eat well, engage in regular physical activity and incorporate healthy habits into their everyday lives since 2003.

Our approach of Prevention, Research and Outreach provides schools, communities and like-minded organizations with educational programs, technical assistance, collaborative partnerships and access to proven wellness interventions.

PREVENTION

The Center provides an evidence-based approach to understanding and reducing the risks of childhood obesity. We facilitate proven interventions and capacity building, and offer technical assistance and hands-on project management to overcome obstacles that prevent access to healthy alternatives. In addition to educating and inspiring people to make healthy choices, the Center focuses on environmental and lifestyle changes that remove barriers and increase access to healthy behaviors where we learn, work, play and live.

RESEARCH

We recognize the importance of integrating research, evidence and data into our programs to ensure value and credibility to those we serve.

OUTREACH

We strive to educate and inspire youth and families to incorporate healthy lifestyle choices daily. Our outreach efforts include increasing public awareness through regional event participation as well as providing various materials related to nutrition, physical activity and other obesity related issues.



*PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION • ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION
CAPACITY BUILDING • TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE • COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS
TRAINING • ACCESS TO PROVEN WELLNESS INTERVENTIONS*



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