

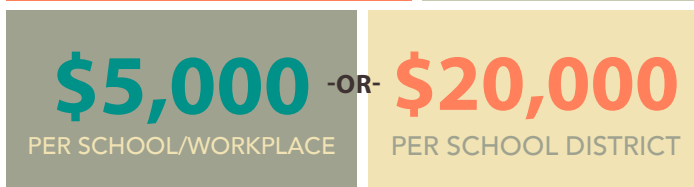
WELLNESS AT WORK:

Kaiser Permanente OEBB Workplace Wellness Space Grants



INTRODUCTION

Chronic stress is one of the most pressing health issues facing educators and school staff, yet most workplaces don't offer a space to practice self-care. In an effort to help reduce stress and promote staff wellbeing, Kaiser Permanente partnered with the Oregon Educators Benefit Board (OEBB) to launch the Workplace Wellness Space Grant program in 2019. Within the last three years, two grant cycles have taken place and a third is currently in place. This case study highlights activities, accomplishments, and experiences of school districts, educational services districts, and community colleges that received awards during the first two cycles of this grant program.



Wellness Space Grant Objectives

CREATE A DEDICATED SPACE IN THE WORKPLACE TO FACILITATE:

- Employee relaxation
- Social interaction
- Collaboration

WORKPLACE WELLNESS SPACE GRANTS IN ACTION

Project and administrative leads, including teachers, principals, and superintendents, spearheaded the Wellness Space Grants and collaborated with a variety of colleagues, from maintenance personnel to business office and procurement staff, along the way. All of the grants focused on creating a welcoming, dedicated physical space within the work place to reduce stress, promote team building and improve

"We have received a lot of positive feedback about the wellness space. We regularly see staff using the wellness space puzzles or relaxing on the furniture during their breaks. There are more people in the staff room than prior to the updates. We have received feedback that it is a relaxing space that staff enjoy."

– TEACHER/ADMIN

overall mental health among staff. The grants prioritized low-income districts/schools and staff/teacher mental, emotional and physical wellbeing, which has been largely ignored in the past, to reduce historical inequities.

With support from the Wellness Space Grants, staff wellness teams embarked on creating the wellness space, gathering input from other staff members, managing and often participating in renovations (e.g., painting, installing new flooring), and purchasing new furniture and equipment to support a variety of staff wellness needs, including massage chairs, stretching and yoga equipment, comfortable furniture, noise-canceling headphones, and stress-reduction aids.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

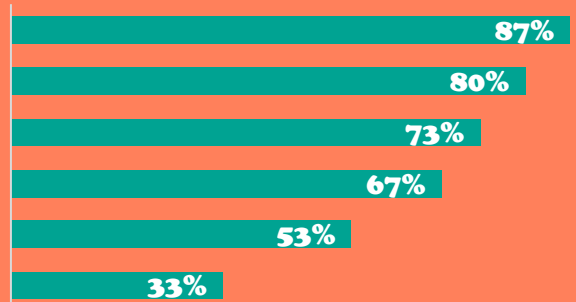
The first two cycles of the Wellness Space Grants took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, creating additional stress and difficulty for many education sector employees and further elevating the need for dedicated spaces and activities promoting and prioritizing staff wellbeing. Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, awardees moved forward with their wellness space plans and made an impact on staff wellbeing. The chart below describes the accomplishments reported by awardees.

In addition to creating the physical wellness spaces, some awardees provided virtual staff wellness activities during remote work, such as online meditation and yoga sessions. As staff have returned to the workplace, they are benefitting from the wellness spaces through enhanced opportunities to decompress during the work day, and a pleasant and inviting space for socializing and collaborating with one another.

Perceived Program Accomplishments (n=15)



- Increased staff access to space for relaxation
- Improved staff morale
- Leadership prioritizes staff wellness
- Decreased staff stress
- More socializing among staff
- Enhanced collaboration among staff



Awardees

- Canby School District 86
- Centennial School District 28J*
- Clatskanie School District
- Creswell School District
- David Douglas School District*
- Falls City School District
- Linn Benton Lincoln Edu. Services District
- Mt. Hood Community College
- Multnomah Educational Services District
- North Marion School District
- Rainier School District
- Silver Falls School District
- Tigard-Tualatin School District 23J*
- Vernonia School District
- Willamina School District*

* received award in cycle 1 & 2



CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

Awardees cited the COVID-19 pandemic as the major challenge to Wellness Space Grant implementation; four awardees experienced severe pandemic related delays with their wellness space project and were in the initial implementation phase at the time of the grant end survey. Pandemic related challenges described by awardees included: 1) staff inability to be on site to complete the wellness space, 2) the need for staff to focus on urgent COVID-19 response (e.g., remote learning), and 3) difficulty engaging staff equitably to plan the wellness space during remote work. Limited bandwidth to move the work forward was another commonly named challenge. Less frequently mentioned challenges included difficulty meeting staffs' diverse wellness interests, finding usable space, and challenges ordering equipment. Staff responded to challenges by being flexible and

adapting their approach as conditions changed. Several awardees focused on pulling together a team to keep the work moving forward, while others highlighted pausing when needed as the pandemic continued and clearly communicating changes to the project timeline.

ADVICE TO OTHER SCHOOLS/DISTRICTS/WORKPLACES

Awardees reflected on a number of factors that supported or hindered implementation of their grants. Advice for others interested in creating a workplace wellness space include:

- Identify a team of colleagues committed to helping create the wellness space and move the work forward. This prevents one person from needing to take on full responsibility, and generates buy-in among a larger group of staff who will use and promote the wellness space. An example of this could be leveraging a wellness committee.
- Collaborate early on with departments such as Facilities and Purchasing. Facilities staff play an important role in making sure new wellness spaces are safe and “up to code”, while a good relationship with Purchasing facilitates buying furniture and supplies. Good communication early on ensures a smooth process as the project unfolds.
- Partner with workplace leadership to support early planning and generate enthusiasm for wellness spaces. School, district and workplace leadership can help identify and advocate for dedicated physical space and trouble shoot issues that arise during wellness space completion. Once the wellness space is complete, leadership plays an important role in integrating wellness into the workplace culture, approving policies and practices that maximize wellness space use, and encouraging staff to use wellness resources.



SPOTLIGHT: DAVID DOUGLAS SCHOOL DISTRICT

David Douglas School District received Wellness Space Grant funds two years in a row, allowing staff to create dedicated wellness spaces in 8 schools. Administration and teachers played a strong leadership role in the development and design of the different wellness spaces. At Lincoln Park Elementary, staff specifically wanted a space with greenery, exercise equipment and comfortable furniture for relaxation. Staff worked with the facilities department to make purchases to set up a meditation corner, comfortable seating area, and a fitness zone that includes an exercise bike, mats and an assortment of rollers and massagers. David Douglas School District is already thinking about sustainability, working with administration and staff to identify leads to maintain the spaces, and weaving additional funding sources together to support staff wellness into the future.

PARTNERING WITH KAISER PERMANENTE

All awardees view Kaiser Permanente as an important partner in making schools a healthy place. They appreciate the dedicated financial resources, training and educational supports, and collaboration and support provided by Kaiser Permanente during grant implementation.

“This grant allowed us to create welcoming, relaxing, safe centers that are hubs of recreation, meditation and productivity. The partnership [with Kaiser Permanente] allowed for these spaces to become more than we would ever have been able to do on our own. We are filled with gratitude.”

– PRINCIPAL

CONCLUSION

The Workplace Wellness Space Grant Program illustrates how small investments and committed teams can create appealing, inviting spaces that create opportunities for stress reduction, relaxation, and staff interaction, leading to improved staff morale. Wellness spaces give staff workday opportunities for mindfulness, meditation and exercise, all of which help staff cope with anxieties and trauma to meet job demands and effectively serve students and families.

Canby School District Elementary School



BEFORE: Staff lounge prior to renovations



AFTER: Wellness Space created with funding from the Workplace Wellness Space Grant Program

The Workplace Wellness Space Grant Program was funded by Kaiser Permanente and conducted in partnership with the Oregon Educators Benefit Board. This case study was developed based on findings from an awardee survey and interviews with district and school personnel involved in wellness space implementation.

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