

White River Valley Supervisory Union Wellness Team

WSCC Grant Final Report

October 2016

Beginning Implementation of School Wellness Policies

We are pleased to report that Royalton, Chelsea, Tunbridge, and Strafford have adopted the Wellness Policy drafted by our team. Sharon is scheduled for policy adoption in November. The former Windsor Northwest SU schools of Bethel, Rochester, and Stockbridge are somewhat behind in the policy process and will just hold their first reading of the policy in the month ahead. Although the process has gone more slowly than we hoped, we are thrilled that every board so far has adopted the policy as written. This not only means that each school now has a vastly improved policy but that equity has increased because our schools are all working from the same Wellness policy.

During the OWSU/WNWSU consolidation last year, it was frequently noted that we were becoming the most complicated supervisory union in the state. The glacial pace with which our policy has been adopted further proves this point, but it should be noted that adoption was slowed by board scheduling challenges, slimmed down summer schedules, and overloaded agendas, not due to a lack of support for the new policy. Unfortunately, the slow policy adoption meant that we did not receive our grant funds until recently, leading us to just begin implementing the grant in October. We intend to continue with the implementation plan created in the spring of 2016, although we cannot report our progress at this time.

One exciting element of our early implementation efforts is that some schools plan to utilize additional funds to further our Wellness Goals. For example, South Royalton purchased one bottle filler from the Wellness grant funds and their Booster Club funded two additional fillers. Similarly, Bethel decided to go beyond buying water bottles for three elementary grades and has ordered a water bottle for every student and staff member. This extension of our work is a very positive sign of the enthusiasm for Wellness in the new White River Valley SU!

Although it is too early to report on implementation of our new policy, we have found school administrators as well as the superintendent to be extremely supportive thus far. In our most recent Wellness team meeting, it was noted that the policy requires a change of culture in some schools--particularly when it comes to not taking away recess--and that it will probably take some time for schools to reach full compliance. Fortunately, we are optimistic that schools will make the changes necessary since the superintendent and principals have expressed strong support for the policy.

Given the extremely long process involved in adopting a new policy in our complex SU, the Wellness Team recently agreed not to suggest changes to the policy during this school year. However, we believe it would be fruitful to re-examine the policy toward the end of the 2016-17

academic year in order to assess compliance, raise concerns, and consider changes for the future. Through this process we have learned that staff may need professional development or additional education to fully understand and implement the Wellness policy. We intend to discuss this topic in the spring of 2017, after gathering feedback from all of the health-related staff across our SU.

Looking beyond our own SU, we would strongly encourage our colleagues to assess the length of the policy adoption process in their supervisory union before committing to a time frame for implementing goals or spending grant funds. We would also recommend choosing only a modest initiative to start but focusing on educating all staff members about key changes to the policy. For example, in the WRVSU, we perhaps would have been wiser to allocate grant funds toward professional development that could support educators as they transition from taking away recess as a consequence. In other words, we would recommend keeping goals and funding as closely tied to the policy itself as possible.

Sustainability of the WSCC Team

We were fortunate in WRVSU to have broad and early agreement that our Wellness Team would serve as the clearinghouse for all health-related grant funds. This provides us with an ongoing need to meet, especially because we have significant funding from both the ADAP and school-based tobacco grant for the next several years. We continue to be well-represented by all of the WSCC domains. Our Team Coordinator remains the same and we continue to work closely and productively with our school nurse liaison, who is always present at our meetings. We recently welcomed Cathy Hazlett, Executive Director of Health Connections of the Upper Valley, as a new member of our Team.

Our Wellness Team discussed communication at our most recent meeting and agreed to some creative methods for getting the word out about our efforts. First, we are working with our Technology Director to find a place on our new SU's website where Wellness minutes can be made available (we have also switched to utilizing Google docs to align more closely with our schools and make documents easier to access). Secondly, we plan to include a Wellness update in the SU section of all WRVSU Town Reports. We believe this will help us reach a much broader population within our communities. Finally, we are asking student reporters to write about our work. Their article will be submitted to the Herald of Randolph (our local weekly paper) and will also run in each school's newsletter. Our team has worked hard during the past year and we are pleased to have found a variety of ways to share our progress throughout our communities!

Moving forward, we are also very fortunate to have access to excellent data because of our work on the school-based tobacco grant. Not only do we have the Getting to Y process underway in Bethel, but every 4th-6th grader in WRVSU will take a Developmental Assets profile in November and each school will complete the School Health Index by the end of this academic year. Cathy Hazlett of Health Connections has offered to provide data aggregation

and analysis, which will help us capitalize on the rich data we're collecting this year and ensure that we are working as a data-driven team.

Final Thoughts

A year ago, we cobbled together our Wellness Team as our two SUs were transitioning into a single entity, melding cultures and sorting through a mountain of logistical differences. Simply convening a team that included each school of the new SU and represented every domain of the WSCC model seemed like an enormous success last December! The fact that we have continued meeting and we crafted a much-improved Wellness policy is a sign of our hard work and of team members' tremendous dedication the students in WRVSU schools. Although the WSCC grant was relatively modest, it provided an impetus for us to collaborate at a new level to promote wellness in our SU and we are very grateful to have been given this opportunity. We are proud of what we have accomplished in the past year and we look forward to further improving wellness within each school in the White River Valley Supervisory Union.

Respectfully Submitted,

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