



Partners in Learning – Salisbury, NC Culture of Wellness: By the Numbers

Organization Background

Partners in Learning is a nonprofit child care and education center on the campus of Catawba College in Salisbury, North Carolina. The organization has 45 employees and serves approximately 150 children on a daily basis.

Wellness Components

In May 2014, Partners in Learning earned Prevention Partners' Excellence Recognition, which reflects meeting the highest standard of workplace health and promotion by achieving straight A's in the areas of nutrition, physical activity, tobacco-free, and culture of wellness. With support from Prevention Partners over the previous two and a half years, Partners in Learning implemented comprehensive workplace environment changes to support employee health, including:

- Improved nutrition, physical activity, and tobacco-free policies
- Quarterly employee wellness assessments
- Monthly wellness bonus and support for running classes and gym memberships
- Healthy meals served family-style for staff and children emphasizing whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and water
- At least one hour of structured physical activity for each childcare class
- Staff smoking cessation group
- Weight loss and wellness challenges
- Access to a walking track, stationary bike work desk, and Wii console
- Point-of-decision prompts and educational signage encouraging walking and stretch breaks

Results

Partners in Learning tracked health outcomes among its 45 employees on a quarterly basis. Over two years, Partners in Learning employees lost 359 pounds (net weight loss). In just the last quarter, Partners in Learning employees lost a total of 109 pounds. Furthermore, 6 out of 11 employees who used to have high blood sugar are no longer at risk. PIL also cut employee obesity and hypertension rates in half, and helped 4 out of 5 smokers quit in the past 2 years.

"We're really proud of these numbers," said David Freeze, wellness coordinator for Partners in Learning.



Above: An employee serves a child flavored water, modeling this as a healthier choice than a sugar-sweetened beverage.

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Above: A PIL employee uses a stationary bike work desk.

This successful shift in culture of wellness is founded in the personal touch of its wellness programs and support. David completes quarterly one-on-one health assessments with each employee, collaborates with employees to create their own wellness development plans and stays in touch with staff via email about their personal goals. David said, “The health of employees is very important. We know that to be the best they can be, they must be in the best health, and if there is a problem it should be taken care of right away.”

This healthier workplace environment benefits employees but also supports Partners in Learning’s business motives.

“Our main focus is on the children,” Deborah Howell, assistant director of Partners in Learning, said. “Our staff efforts trickle down to our children, resulting in healthier eating, more physical activity and overall better health for the children in our facility.”

Tracking employee health outcomes has helped Partners in Learning to apply for grants from local agencies for wellness and provided justification for wellness funding in the organization’s operational budget. Partners in Learning also shares information with community members and agencies to promote the organization. “We are getting the word out about Partners in Learning and how we are setting the stage in the community for wellness and healthy lifestyle changes for staff,” said Deborah.

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Building a workplace environment that supports health fostered positive attitudes toward wellness among employees. Partners in Learning saw 100% participation in its initial round of heart risk assessment offered through a local hospital. “Everybody was excited to have the opportunity to have the testing done,” Deborah commented. Deborah also reported seeing improved morale and camaraderie among staff as wellness programs have developed.

As Partners in Learning has established a healthier workplace environment, the process of assessing health outcomes and setting individual goals has become smoother over time. “Staff expect to be a part of it and come in with their own ideas, ready to go,” David said.

“After the two and a half years that we’ve been doing this program – it’s just a part of what we do.”