



Prioritizing Staff and Student Health in Cherokee County School District

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The students in [Cherokee County School District](#) (CCSD) agree: when teachers feel good, they are better teachers. The youth-led wellness initiative, FIT2gether, has built a culture in CCSD that prioritizes the physical, mental and social well-being of students, staff and the community. Christina Cody, the Project Lead for FIT2gether and a Culture of Health Leader, understands that it takes a whole school and a whole community to support the whole child.

“Employee wellness impacts student wellness. When students and staff work on their goals and mental health together, the inspiration and motivation benefit all.”

- Christina Cody, FIT2gether Project Lead

Cherokee County faces the same barriers as most rural communities, limited to no affordable places to be physically active. Staff at CCSD also face the same universal challenge as most adults—finding the time. To overcome these burdens, teachers started working out together during their planning and lunch periods. “They loved the fellowship and noticed they were better teachers in the afternoons,” said Cody.

Fitness rooms were soon set-up in a few schools across the district thanks to funding from the MUSC Boeing Center for Children’s Wellness’ ([BCCW](#))

School Wellness Checklist®, fundraising, and donations. Teachers use the fitness rooms during lunch and students join them after school, providing an opportunity to bond while achieving fitness goals.

“The MUSC BCCW helped CCSD take their wellness efforts to the next level with expansion of the School Wellness Checklist® funded by a grant from The Duke Endowment from 2014-2017,” said Dr. Janice Key, MUSC BCCW Director. “The School Wellness Checklist® motivated and supported schools to use more strategies targeting healthy nutrition, physical activity, stress management and employee wellness. CCSD became the leader in school-based wellness, with 100% of their schools participating and earning wellness awards.”

The success of the fitness rooms gained the momentum needed for the school culture to embrace health and fitness. Professional development was provided to staff on the benefits of physical activity and how to incorporate it before, during and after school. Students were provided more opportunities to be physically active not just during physical education and recess but also in classrooms.

Cody has a wealth of advice to share with other districts. “You don’t want employee wellness to be a burden. Offer something for all ages and abilities, and survey staff and students to find out what they need. Find wellness champions and use in-house talent (i.e., teachers/parents who are yoga instructors).



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