



## Staff Wellness: Practices To Support & Uplift Staff



Supporting your staff is essential for success at both the individual and team levels. This resource highlights ideas to foster wellness, increase trust, improve retention, boost morale and overall strengthen your team by showing them that they are valued and appreciated.

*The tips offered within this resource are ideas. Please consult with your district administration and state agency to determine what is allowable.*

### IDEAS FOR RECOGNIZING STAFF

It is important to show your staff that they are appreciated and valued. Staff appreciation is connected to job satisfaction, workplace happiness and employee morale. Here are some ideas for showing staff appreciation:

- Celebrate joyous occasions like births, birthdays and weddings; and show support during hard times like sympathy and sickness. Send a greeting card or virtual group card using a platform like [Kudoboard](#).
- Commemorate years of service, by recognizing employees in 5-year milestones (e.g., on their 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> work anniversaries) with a certificate or plaque. Try a free design tool like [Canva](#) to create a certificate using a customizable template.
- Give out awards to those that receive high marks on sanitation inspection.
- Create a “School Lunch Hero” award. Look into grants or donations to give a gift card to the recipient.
- Shout out someone that you catch doing good work. If possible, take a picture of the staff member “in action” and share it via internal communication channels such as a newsletter and on social media.
- Spotlight the day-to-day great work of staff, special events (like National School Breakfast Week celebrations) and creative ideas (like student-friendly charcuterie boards). This can also create good-spirited competition!

*“Wellness needs to be a priority for yourself first.”*

*--Hitesh Haria, Associate Superintendent, Pittsburg Unified School District, CA*

## IDEAS FOR RECOGNIZING STAFF (Continued)



- Recognize an employee of the month.
- Partner with local shops, restaurants, and vendors to provide your staff with a meal or treats.
- Thank staff publicly. If there is a meeting or assembly, ask the administration if you can make that an opportunity to honor your staff there.
- Create a thank you video in collaboration with school and/or district administrators that you can play during a staff meeting.
- Designate a thank you bulletin board. Ask administrators, teachers, students and other members of the school community to write thank you notes to staff and post them on the bulletin board.
- Embrace [School Lunch Hero Day](#) as an opportunity to create enthusiasm among and appreciation for the team. Make a certificate celebrating the occasion, sign it, frame it and deliver one to each member of your team.
- Create fun t-shirts that your staff can use as their Friday Uniform (note: if worn as a uniform this may be an allowable program expense).
- Give out tote bags customized with a saying like “We tote-ally appreciate you”.
- Host a raffle for prizes. You may be able to use points from vendors to purchase prizes like movie tickets.
- Look for grants for employee incentives (USDA doesn’t allow for money to be invested in employees).



Source: Donna Martin, School Nutrition Program Director, Burke County Public Schools

### SCHOOL LUNCH HERO

- HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN CHILD NUTRITION?**  
9 Years
- GREATEST MEMORY WORKING IN SCHOOL NUTRITION**  
That's my lunch teacher when you see them in public
- WHAT IS YOUR MOST FAVORITE PART ABOUT YOUR JOB?**  
Knowing that I'm helping a child out who may not have food at home to get hot and healthy meals.
- WHAT IS YOUR HERO "SUPERPOWER"?**  
I feed hundreds of hungry kids on a daily basis with a smile on my face.

**ELIZABETH BRINSON**  
Manager  
Burke, CDA, &  
Simmons-Pinckney

Charleston County **SCHOOL DISTRICT** excellence is our standard

Source: Charleston County School District (CCSD) Nutrition Services via Facebook

*“Find out your staff appreciation language and show them appreciation based on their appreciation language, this helps staff feel valued.”*

*--Jessica Shelly, Director of Student Dining Services, Cincinnati Public Schools, OH*

Employee wellness programs are important for staff— they promote and encourage staff to take care of themselves physically, mentally and emotionally. Here are some ideas to consider when setting up a wellness program:

- Designate a point person whose role it is to turn these ideas into action, set up partnerships, seek donations, etc.
- Survey your staff to learn what they're interested in and what days and times are preferential for their schedules.
- Schedule programming at convenient locations and times, when most— ideally all— employees are available to participate.
- Consider a range of activities like a book clubs; steps challenge; exercise classes; and courses on financial wellness, stress management, and mindfulness. Be sure to ask staff what they're interested in before you plan something. Offer incentives for participation, if possible.
- Promote existing wellness benefits that are available to district employees (i.e., gym membership discounts through health insurance).
- Look into grant opportunities and partnerships that can support your wellness programming. Connect with your local health department and district insurance company to ask what is available (i.e., grants, incentives, trainings).
- Set up an on-site workout room. Contact a local gym to ask if they'll be upgrading soon and if they'd be interested in donating some of their existing equipment or check out the "free stuff" section of Facebook Marketplace.
- Hire a massage therapist to offer 15-minute chair massages for staff.
- Partner with the local health department to provide preventative health education classes.
- Designate a wellness room where employees can take a quiet moment to destress and relax. Create a serene atmosphere by adding a comfortable chair, like a recliner or rocker, a sound machine for music or static noise, stress balls or other items to create an atmosphere to relax for a few moments.

### Breathing Exercise

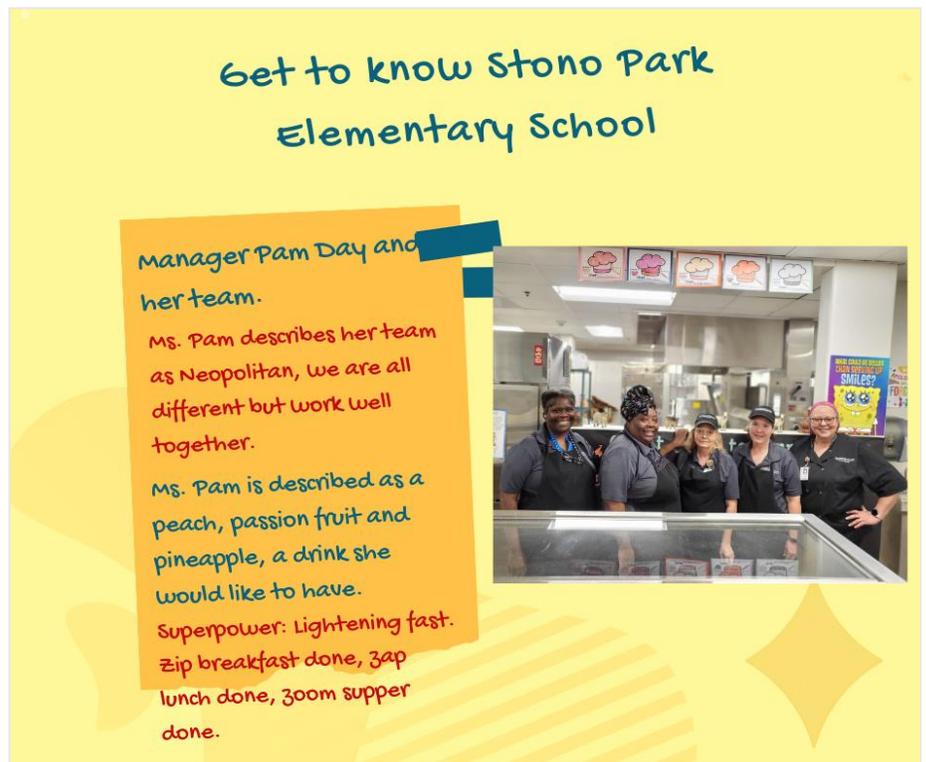
Consider this idea for a quick, relaxation exercise to lead during a team meeting. This breathing exercise only takes 2 minutes to complete and is helpful for relieving stress and gaining focus.

Instruct staff that they can close their eyes or keep them open, based on personal preference.

Repeat 4 times:

- Inhale to the count of 4.
- Hold your breath to the count of 7.
- Exhale to the count of 8.

Shared with us by Hitesh Haria, Associate Superintendent, Pittsburg Unified School District



Source: Charleston County School District (CCSD) Nutrition Services via Facebook

## STAFF RETENTION: VALUE AND BENEFITS



Staff are your most precious commodity; districts should strive to grow staff internally. To do this, they need to attract and retain staff with competitive benefits, including pay and value driven programs. Here are a few promising practices to consider:

- Evaluate your benchmark salaries and if possible, increase them to be competitive in the market.
- Evaluate the ability to increase the benefits that are paid for the staff. Make sure to promote all the wellness benefits that staff have access to (e.g., book clubs, exercise classes, financial planning classes, etc.) and to provide them in the primary languages of staff.
- Work with employees to combine job positions (e.g., custodial staff) for food services and other positions so that the employees have support in food service and can access benefits.
- Work stipend bonus incentives into your yearly contracts to encourage completing a certification process and help create a pipeline of stronger workers. For example, if staff earn a school nutrition certification, compensate them with a yearly bonus where the amount matches the level of certification.
- Provide professional development (PD) and training opportunities to staff. Work with staff to offer opportunities on topics of their interest.
- Create retention programs where employees have regular check-ins with supervisor teams to help develop trust and build their relationship over the first 9 months of work. This can help by creating trust between the employee and the staff mentor.
- Develop a training plan to increase staff skills in areas necessary for promotions or leadership positions. Incorporate leadership development into PD days.

*“Show appreciation to staff when they show up to a training by giving them small items to take home (e.g., swag bags, items they can use).”*

*--Marla Caplon, Former Director of Food & Nutrition Services & Student Wellness Initiatives, Montgomery County, MD*

### Additional Staffing Resources

[Supporting Your Healthy Team: Strategies to Promote Staff Wellness, Motivation & Retention](#) – Webinar slide deck & recording. This panel discussion highlighted strategies to promote staff wellness, motivation and retention.

[Staffing Up: Strategies and Tips to Improve Hiring, Staffing, and Retention in Your Meal Program](#) – Webinar slide deck & recording. This webinar highlighted staffing and retention strategies to help school meals programs succeed.

[Staffing Up: Strategies for Working Through Labor Shortage Challenges](#) – This resource offers promising practices used by school kitchens across the nation to recruit and retain staff.

[Hiring & Retaining Staff: Your Most Precious Commodity](#) – Webinar slide deck & recording. This webinar covered creative strategies for recruiting new staff as well as tips for creating a culture where staff want to stay.

For even more resources, visit our Center for Best Practices website: <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org>



## CONNECTING WITH AND SHOWING APPRECIATION FOR STAFF

It is important to create a culture of communication and trust to help employees feel appreciated and empowered to do their jobs well. Open communication can empower employees to ask for necessities and assist administrators in responding thoughtfully. The following tips are promising practices for creating communication avenues:

- Communicate with staff through town halls, regional meetings, in-service training or weekly short meetings (in-person or online). Allow for conversations and follow-up with answers to questions.
- Listen when visiting schools. Ask employees if they need anything and do your best to provide what is needed. Listen to understand.
- Be transparent with information that you provide. Respond to questions that are asked.
- Be patient, building this culture can take 2-3 years.
- Strive to make sure staff feel safe and protected; trust is built by genuine interest in their lives.
- Organize team building events where staff can gather socially
- Hold routine meetings to hear directly from your staff.
- Visit schools. Assist on the serving line to see and support the program in action. Ask how else you can support their needs.
- To make time, create a standing calendar appointment to go to a school twice a week to interact with staff and communicate with them in a positive way. Even if you can only go once a week, your staff will appreciate it and look forward to your visit.

Source: Charleston County School District (CCSD) Nutrition Services via Facebook

### Stay Connected

Walter Campbell, Executive Director of Nutrition Services at Charleston County School District, organizes an 8 minute online meeting every week with the purpose of connecting with staff.

Give it a try:

**Schedule** – Have a set day and time every week.

**Structure** – Set it up like a town hall where everyone can share.

**Topics** – Birthdays, hot topics, listening, hobbies, and more! Leave the last minute for something inspirational.

**Fun** – Make it exciting by adding an opportunity to win a prize (e.g., use a spin wheel, enter names into a drawing).

