



Sandusky County

Improving Health on Campus — One Meeting at A Time

At a Glance

Workplace settings are ideal for implementing health and wellness initiatives because Americans spend much of their awake time at work. Unfortunately, many employers lack the resources and confidence needed to implement policy and environmental strategies that can influence people's health behaviors. With help from the Sandusky County Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) Program, Terra State Community College now has a policy in place regarding nutrition guidelines for food and beverages served at campus sponsored meetings. More than 250 Terra State employees have increased access to healthy foods and beverages and are encouraged to make healthy food choices while at work.

Public Health Challenge

According to the Sandusky County Community Health Assessment 2017

(CHA), three out of every four adults who live in Sandusky County are either overweight or obese. Obese individuals are at risk for developing health conditions such as type two diabetes and hypertension. These associated health problems have a significant economic impact on the U.S healthcare system. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates the annual medical cost of obesity in the U.S. was \$147 billion in 2008 U.S. dollars, and the out of pocket medical costs for people who are obese were \$1,429 higher than those of normal weight. Furthermore, the indirect obesity-related absenteeism and loss of productivity costs employers billions of dollars per year. As obesity rates continue to rise, so does the cost of health insurance. Employers who offer employee health care insurance coverage are facing much of the financial burden and are increasingly interested in reducing some of this burden by keeping health

care costs down. Since adults spend over one third of their waking hours at work, workplace settings are ideal for implementing health initiatives that positively influence personal behaviors.

Approach

A desire to create a healthier food environment at Terra State Community College led the worksite's leadership team to establish guidelines for food and beverages served at campus sponsored meetings. Terra State's Human Resources (HR) Department and the Conference and Events Center worked closely with Sandusky County CHC to develop a solution that would address the worksite's needs, while considering the campus culture and readiness to change.

An employee survey showed there was strong support among staff for making healthier options more accessible. Results revealed 54 percent of Terra



State employees felt there were not enough healthy foods offered during meetings. A number of suggestions for future meetings were shared with the leadership team and taken into consideration during the development and implementation of the policy. The food and beverage guidelines policy was developed using nutrition standards from the American Heart Association (AHA). It included which types of foods would be addressed and what percentage of foods and beverages would be required to meet the AHA standards. Ongoing communication was provided to employees about the healthy changes that would be taking place, and a kick-off event was held to celebrate the campus's commitment to a healthier organization.

Results

These guidelines created an environment at Terra State Community College where health is valued and supported. As a result of this policy, 50 percent of snacks and nut/fruit mixes and 80 percent of beverages served at meetings are meeting the AHA's recommended standards. Terra State's Conference and Events Center provides on-going promotion of healthy options at meetings through signage, displays, and promotion of portion sizes. This change reaches more than 250 employees, as well as additional visitors and students who attend meetings at the college. Since the policy went into effect, there has been a 55 percent increase in the number of employees who state they are satisfied with the amount and types of healthy food and beverage options offered at meetings; and 72 percent of employees state they are consuming healthier foods and beverages. Employees have expressed excitement about the new healthy options. One employee responded, "I think the health promotional messages are great because they encourage me to choose the healthier options."

What's Next

The leadership team at Terra State Community College took it upon themselves to begin expanding these guidelines in other food settings on campus, including the campus café. The café, which originally offered candy, chips, and sugar-sweetened beverage has begun replacing many of these items with healthier options including low-fat yogurt, baked chips, and even a salad bar. Sandusky County CHC will continue to act as a resource for local organizations and worksites who want to initiate change by creating a healthier food environment.

"I have noticed myself being more focused and alert after meetings now that healthier foods are being served."

— Terra State Employee

Find Out More

You can contribute to creating a culture of health in Sandusky County by improving the food environment at your own workplace. The Ohio Food and Beverage Guidelines toolkit can be used to develop guidelines for almost any setting within the workplace. Included is guidance on customer buy-in, nutrition standards adopted from the AHA, sustainability considerations, assessment/evaluation tools, and marketing/promotion suggestions. Download these resources at <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/creating-healthy-communities/Healthy-Eating/>



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