



**FOR RELEASE:** September 21, 2017

**Contact:**

Michele Bever, Executive Director, South Heartland District Health Department  
Brooke Wolfe, Chronic Disease and Wellness Coordinator, South Heartland District Health Department  
402-462-6211 / toll free 1-877-238-7595 / [michele.bever@shdhd.org](mailto:michele.bever@shdhd.org)

\*\*\*\*\*

**School Wellness: Changing the culture**

“Lack of student focus, increased disciplinary actions and decreases in test scores are things schools face every day,” said Montessa Munoz, director of learning and support for Hastings Public Schools. “We want our students to receive a great education so they can become successful adults, and now our schools have additional ‘coordinated school health’ tools to help make that happen.”

Research shows that children don’t learn as well if they aren’t healthy. A child’s physical, dental and mental health are all important, as well as the “environment” where they are learning. Hastings Public Schools has been partnering with South Heartland District Health Department to learn about the coordinated school health approach to student wellness.

“Coordinated School Health is an evidence-based, systems-building process that teaches schools how to create an environment where a student’s holistic health needs can be met,” said Michele Bever, PhD, MPH, director of South Heartland District Health Department. “This includes 8 areas of focus: health education, physical education, health services, nutrition services, counseling and physiological services, healthy school environment, health promotion for staff, and family and community involvement.”

Since 2013, South Heartland has partnered with the Nebraska Department of Education to sponsor Coordinated School Institutes for schools and school districts in their service area of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties.

At the institutes, School Wellness Teams complete a school health assessment, review their wellness policies, set priorities customized to their needs and goals, learn about best practices, develop action plans, revise or develop policies, and begin implementing programs and policies to support a culture of health.

Bever said that South Heartland District Health Department has been “encouraging schools to complete the Coordinated School Health Institutes so that schools can incorporate student and staff wellness into their culture.”

Schools that have completed the Institutes in the past include: Adams Central High School, Hastings Middle School, Hastings High School, Hastings Public’s Hawthorne, Lincoln, and Morton Elementary Schools, Hastings Catholic Schools, Harvard Public Schools, and Superior High School.

The wellness teams from Alcott, Longfellow and the HPS District Office were recently recognized for completing training institutes, and joined the other five schools in the HPS system in becoming “Coordinated School Health” schools.

“These dedicated individuals are leading by example in creating environments that will improve the health and wellness of children they serve leading to improved student learning,” said Julane Hill, coordinated school health specialist with the Nebraska Department of Education. “Because of their passion, dedication, and leadership, the children entrusted in their care will have enhanced opportunities to become healthy, productive citizens.”

A member of Longfellow’s School Wellness Team shared that she agreed to attend the institutes in order “to understand compliance [with] federal mandates [for school wellness policies], but also our staff at Longfellow want to help students and families develop lifelong healthy habits.”

Hastings Public School’s District Office felt it was important to participate in the institutes to insure they “are all on the same page about what wellness means and how we go about implementing a wellness program” across the entire district.

Coordinated School Health schools in the South Heartland health district are changing their wellness culture by implementing a variety of new programs and policies, such as morning walking clubs, brain breaks, school wellness days, healthy rewards, healthy snack carts, new physical activity opportunities at lunch, curriculum improvements and more.

These schools have helped to decrease sugary beverage consumption and to increase opportunities for physical activity, promoted girl empowerment and supported staff wellness initiatives so staff are healthier and serve as better models to the students. Schools are tracking the results of these changes by monitoring, for example, the number of behavior issues, the number of referrals to the nurse, or the number of minutes students are active during the school day.

“After all,” said HPS’s Munoz, “healthy kids equal ‘better prepared to learn’ kids!”

##