



CASE STUDY: Des Moines Public Schools



How the **Wellmark Well-being Team** helped
DMPS take their well-being program to the next level

Meet DMPS

In the 100+ years since its first school day, the [Des Moines Public School \(DMPS\)](#) district has grown into the largest public education provider in Iowa.



As a self-funded group, DMPS has always believed in doing right by their employees — especially when it comes to the well-being of their staff. To help identify ways to better support and grow their workforce, the district met with the Wellmark Well-being Team in 2008 for an initial consultation.

Performing an audit of DMPS’ existing well-being program and processes, the Well-being Team identified three central goals and objectives — and several challenges.



100+
year tenure



5k+
staff members



63
buildings



30k+
students enrolled

Goals and objectives



Streamline and modernize process management.
Build systems that are efficient, save time and eliminate unnecessary work.



Boost employee recruitment, engagement and retention.
Create attractive and competitive well-being programs that resonate with workers.



Develop data-driven solutions that build employee satisfaction.
Establish a framework of ongoing critical support and responsive metrics tracking.

Facing unique challenges

DMPS’ overarching goal has been to provide employees with an effective well-being program that evolves with the changing needs of the district’s workforce. However, DMPS has juggled limited well-being staff support while striving to overcome three distinct roadblocks.

Strategic solutions for distinct challenges

Several recommendations were implemented throughout the last 15 years to address the district’s challenges. Today, both DMPS and Wellmark Well-being teams work together to regularly review staff needs, well-being program updates and any new challenges.

1

CHALLENGE

[Process management]

DMPS needed to modernize their process management and streamline work patterns. For example: Many well-being tasks used printed forms to document activity participation and required the small DMPS team to manually log data collected within each form.

With over 5,000 staff members, this process created a lot of extra work. The district needed help identifying a new process that could both help the program succeed and better support the small staff managing the program.

SOLUTION

Based on experience and industry best practices, the Wellmark Well-being Team knew transitioning the district’s program management to a digital platform, like the Wellmark Wellness Center, would pave the way for long-term success.

The Wellness Center streamlined many of the administrative tasks required to manage the thousands of employee well-being benefits accounts. The shift replaced the pen-and-paper process DMPS had previously used with a library of self-serve options including automatic engagement messages and rewards tracking.

RESULT

The program now runs more efficiently, which allows Katie Northness, the DMPS Wellness Program Manager, to spend her time focused on creating specific wellness strategies for DMPS staff.

“As a one-person wellness team assisting 6,000-plus employees, it helps to have the Well-being Team providing extra support. I like having someone to reach out to if I have questions and getting their insight into what other employers are doing. Our relationship is absolutely beneficial and valuable.”



Katie Northness
DMPS Wellness Program Manager

2

CHALLENGE [Engagement and recruitment]

In their long-standing commitment to staff well-being, several years ago DMPS began offering a \$0 premium incentive to staff members participating in the district-wide health and well-being program.

This incentive continues to be very popular, but DMPS knew they wanted to do more to stay competitive in the local job market and keep their current employees engaged. The struggle became splitting time between tracking existing incentive program participation and strategizing new ideas for engagement — with the latter often falling to the wayside.

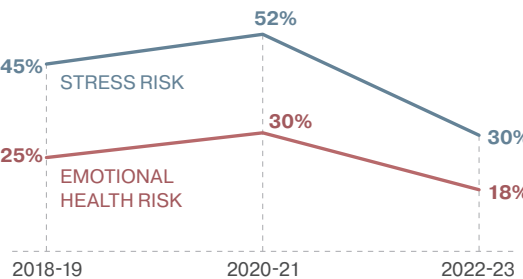
SOLUTION

Finding ways to keep employees actively engaged in well-being programs, while simultaneously bringing in new workers, requires extensive time and resources. The Wellmark Well-being Team is able to fill that gap, while simultaneously providing consultative services and support for process improvement.

Using the district’s quarterly reports and insurance claims data, the Wellmark Well-being Team regularly researches and identifies enhancement opportunities. This data collection drives program growth and evolution, retaining the interest of existing employees and tapping into shifting industry needs to attract new workers.

RESULT

Keeping its staff healthy and engaged is a big part of why DMPS regularly reviews health assessment data. This research has helped the district reduce significant mental health risks and boost engagement and retention.



For example, noting a 5-7% rise in stress and emotional health risks from 2018-2020, DMPS and the Well-being Team heavily promoted their Doctor On Demand® mental health resources and added mental health activities to the well-being program. The efforts helped reduce the mental health risks by 20%.

Stress and emotional health risk statistics gathered from 2018-2020 DMPS Wellness Assessment employee data.

CHALLENGE

[Employee data tracking]

The district also sought ways to regularly touch base with staff, especially during high-stress moments (like the pandemic, economic downturns and social unrest). Developing the ability to assess staff needs and track those findings would help create a pathway for identifying issues and creating solutions. But, without this employee data, there was no way to create targeted communications and establish support needs.

DMPS knew an outside tool with survey capabilities would help make employee data tracking happen. They turned to the Well-being Team for help building a system that could provide a sense of anonymity and enable people to feel safe sharing their feedback.



SOLUTION

High-stress moments have big impacts on organizational culture. In these situations, the Wellmark Well-being Team encourages increased employer communications to capture data and find opportunities to identify and offer support.

The Wellmark Well-being Team has worked with the district to leverage regular pulse surveys to check on the work environment and communication needs, stress points and more.

RESULT

Using the response data, DMPS adjusts the frequency and transparency of their communication materials to match what they learn. This attentive approach helps employees feel heard, boosts morale and increases trust between the administration and staff.

“There are definite advantages to having our well-being program managed by our health plan provider. For example, the Wellmark Well-being Team could see we were having a rise in employee mental health claims data, and they were ready with programs and resources we could try with the staff.”

Katie Northness
DMPS Wellness Program Manager



Metric tracking and measurable results

The Wellness Center features robust reporting capabilities — something the district had always wanted to improve upon.

The Wellmark Well-being Team works with DMPS to establish yearly benchmark goals which help measure progress and success. Every quarter an easy-to-understand and use metric report is distributed to key stakeholders illustrating participation and engagement levels.

These reports show DMPS what's working well within their existing wellness programs or any areas in which improvements could be made. For example, a cost-savings pattern was clearly seen when studying the historical data of the well-being program participants versus non-participants.

Additionally, a consistent correlation is visible in the percentage of workers registered with the Wellness Center and those engaged in the program:



Well-being program participants cost
\$687* LESS PER PERSON
in claims compared to those who do not participate.

*Average savings per participant using data from 2015-2023.

“When it comes to our well-being program engagement — the consistency in our participation rates has been one of the most impressive things for me.”

Katie Northness
DMPS Wellness Program Manager

80%
Wellness Center
registration

85%
Program
participation

Ready to grow your success?



“ When we work with our groups, we collect expertise from multiple Wellmark teams to deliver the best strategies. This includes insights from the health plan account manager, an analytics consultant and our Well-being Team. We each see things from a different lens so it’s much easier to find and address any potential gaps in care. ”

Cory Jackson, Wellmark Well-being Consultant

WORK WITH THE WELLMARK WELL-BEING TEAM

Even the best planned well-being program isn’t meant to stay the same year-after-year. Your people, your organization and the overall state of the economy are constantly changing. What’s important is how you monitor those changes — and your ability to build the strategies needed to stay ahead. Contact us for a free, personalized consultation to learn more about how we can help your organization.

Contact us for a free consultation. Email us at wellbeing@wellmark.com.



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