

Introduction

The Center for Urban Health (CUH) and the Office for Student Life and Engagement at Thomas Jefferson University (TJU) are working with two public elementary schools in Philadelphia – Southwark School and Independence Charter School – to create a culture of health in the schools. Both schools wish to establish an environment that promotes health and safety and assists children in developing life-long healthy habits. The offices at TJU set out a plan to

- (1) Assess the current policies and climate at the schools,
- (2) Identify priority weaknesses to address,
- (3) Connect TJU’s various health professional schools and student organizations with the elementary schools.

The goal is for TJU students to assist in addressing the schools’ needs by developing health promotional programs and volunteering their time to implement the programs. Our project was to address the first step of this plan: to develop a wellness assessment to evaluate the health policies and practices in the schools.

Methods

Identify existing assessments



Establish expectations of schools



Choose an assessment based on schools’ feedback



Modify assessment based on schools’ needs

Results

We identified three existing school health assessments:

- ✓ Wellness School Assessment Tool (WellSAT)
- ✓ Healthy Schools Program (HSP): Framework of Best Practices
- ✓ School Health Index (SHI)

Table 1 summarizes the results of our evaluations of the three identified assessments.

Upon reviewing the formats and topics covered by these assessments, we decided the School Health Index (SHI) was the most appropriate tool for our schools’ needs. We then developed three Additional Modules of questions covering topics that are not emphasized or covered by the SHI that our schools’ expressed interest in. All of the assessment modules are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Wellness assessment modules.

SHI Modules	
Module 1: School Health and Safety Policies and Environment	Assesses the existence and implementation of health and safety policies.
Module 2: Health Education	Assesses the content and delivery of the health education curriculum.
Module 3: Physical Education and Other Physical Activity Programs	Assesses the content and delivery of the PE curriculum as well as other opportunities for physical activity during and after school.
Module 4: Nutrition Services	Assesses the nutritional standards of the food and beverages students consume while at school.
Module 5: School Health Services	Assesses the health services provided at school and the policies in place regarding these services.
Module 6: School Counseling, Psychological, and Social Services	Assesses the availability of these services to students.
Module 7: Health Promotion for Staff	Assesses the programs in place to promote staff wellness.
Module 8: Family and Community Involvement	Assesses the involvement of student families and the surrounding community in health promotion and activities.
Additional Modules	
Module 9: School Environment	Assesses the safety of the physical environment as well as the climate of the school.
Module 10: Behavior and Mental Health Management	Assesses the services and management plans in place to address these needs.
Module 11: Cultural Responsiveness	Assesses the school’s ability to promote wellness and provide health services to a diverse student population.

Table 1. Evaluations of assessments.

Assessments	Pros	Cons
WellSAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Easy to use ✓ Graded responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Assesses only written policies ✓ Designed for district level
HSP Framework of Best Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Easy to use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Checklist format makes it difficult to identify priorities to improve
SHI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Includes system to identify priorities ✓ Easy to omit non-applicable questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Very long and detailed

Discussion

- ✓ Now that we have chosen and modified an assessment, our next steps include:
 - ✓ Deciding who will fill out the surveys
 - ✓ Developing an improvement plan upon completing the surveys
 - ✓ Identifying TJU professional schools and student organizations that can fill the needs decided on in the improvement plan
- ✓ The Additional Modules we designed would be applicable to most schools in urban environments with diverse student populations.
- ✓ The partnership between Jefferson and these two public schools could serve as a model for future partnerships between elementary schools and institutions of higher education, particularly health professional schools that have the interest, resources, and expertise in this area.
- ✓ School programs have the ability to influence both children and their families; we hope that a healthy culture in the schools will extend to the children’s homes and communities.

References

1. Ogden C, Carroll M, Kit B, Flegal K. Prevalence of childhood and adult obesity in the united states, 2011-2012. *JAMA*. 2014;311(8):806-814.
2. Franks P, Hanson R, Knowler W, Sievers M, Bennett P, Looker H. Childhood obesity, other cardiovascular risk factors, and premature death. *N Engl J Med*. 2010;362:485-493.