

## Health and Wellness Program

Social workers in the School City of East Chicago (SCEC) reported an exacerbated impact of Covid-19 on the mental health of teachers and paraprofessionals. A national study suggested that much of staff stress is related to managing their families from home while simultaneously incorporating new procedures and technology into teaching remotely. Therefore, Top 20, Inc., working with Purdue Nutrition Education Program designed a project to serve teachers and paraprofessionals in the School City of East Chicago (SCEC). Together we developed a series of workshops and presentations to help alleviate the mounting stress staff had undergone due to the impact of the pandemic and to improve their health. This initiative was funded by Franciscan Health Alliance.

The activities were hosted at various schools tailored to the responses we received from the specific staff in that building based upon results of a survey we administered prior to the start of the program. However, regardless of the location of the activity, the events were open and available to teachers and paraprofessionals in the entire district via zoom. That was because the covid protocols implemented by the school district prevented staff from one school entering other school buildings.

Our program wasn't meant to change the conditions under which teachers operate, but rather to help them better manage their anxiety and stress and possibly prevent burnout by providing them: a) tips and exercises to relieve stress; b) recipes and cooking demonstrations to eat healthy; c) tours of greenhouses and places to purchase fresh food; and, d) challenges structured to encourage them to meet health wellness goals. At least one activity was provided each month which was fun, educational, and/or energetic.

We offered at least one monthly activity and/or provided resources that might improve their physical, social wellbeing, and overall health following the covid-19 experience. The activities were fun, educational, and/or energetic. There were workshops on stress reduction, breast cancer awareness, and heart health. We provided the staff physical activity using yoga and aerobic movements. The teachers and paraprofessionals also attended three (3) healthy cooking classes at Ivy Tech and went on field trips to a Farmers' Market and greenhouse. The post survey provided at the end of the program indicated the staff felt the program helped them to increase exercise and vitality, increase their consumption of fresh foods, improved their knowledge of nutrition and healthy recipes. It is hoped that these positive results also accrued benefits to the students.