http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/102512/wellnessSM.png**PW-S School District, UWM collaborate on a unique, intern-led program intended to result in healthier employees, reduced health-care costs**

If teachers in the Port Washington-Saukville School District seem to have a little more energy lately, it may have something to do with yoga on Mondays, in-line skating on Tuesdays and the occasional juice bar and nutrition education seminar.

Those are just a few of the offerings of the district's new wellness program, a unique initiative that administrators hope will pay off for employees and taxpayers.

"The goals of this program are pretty simple — to have a healthier staff and to control our health insurance costs," Director of Special Services Duane Woelfel said. "And it's free, so it's really a win-win program."

Free because it is led by Ashley Block, a kinesiology student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee who, until she graduates in December, holds the title of the Port-Saukville School District's health and wellness programming intern.

Block works in the district four days a week coordinating a host of programs for employees that, in addition to regular yoga classes and in-line skating outings, include bike trips, walks, art therapy sessions and therapeutic dance classes.

"We had more than 80 employees turn out for our kick-off walk," Woelfel said.

Block is also working with area businesses like Port Washington State Bank to offer programs on topics that include financial health.

"Wellness is about so much more than just fitness and nutrition," Woelfel said.

There are obvious benefits to having a healthier, happier, more productive staff, but the wellness program is also designed to have a direct impact on one of the district's most significant costs — health insurance premiums.

The district recently switched its health insurance from WEA Trust to Humana, whose Vitality program allows members to earn wellness points that equate to discounts on merchandise for

employees and reductions in premiums for employers. The district stands to save thousands of dollars on its premium if enough employees participate, and it's Block's job to help make sure the district gets credit for having active employees.

"Our insurance carrier has been very receptive to our wellness program," Woelfel said.

The wellness program makes so much sense, administrators said, that they would like to be able to claim credit for carefully orchestrating the initiative, but they admit that wasn't the case.

"It came about almost accidentally," Thomas Jefferson Middle School Principal Arlan Galarowicz said. "I'd love to say this really took a lot of planning, but it didn't. All it took was a conversation with a parent."

Last year, Galarowicz was talking with Susan Cashin, whose son was a student at the middle school, when the topic of her career came up. It was an epiphany of sorts for both Cashin and Galarowicz.

As the interim assistant dean of student affairs in UWM's College of Health Sciences, Cashin knows how important quality internship opportunities are for college students. And Galarowicz was part of an administrative team working to create a well-organized and comprehensive wellness program.

The initiative that was borne of this chance conversation is not only novel in the educational system, it's been mutually beneficial to the district and UWM, administrators said.

"We're trying to pioneer a new approach to wellness, and thus far it's been a wonderful, coordinated effort," Woelfel said.

Block's internship will end in December, but she hopes the program will continue for the sake of everyone involved.

"This is really the start of something new for this district and UWM," she said. "It's such a worthwhile program that I'm really surprised other districts aren't doing the same thing."

Image Information: HEALTH TEACHER Joy Nirode led phy-ed teachers Colette Piontek (right) and Jill Sullivan on a recent in-line skating outing that is a regular part of the Port Washington-Saukville School District's new employee wellness program. The program is coordinated by intern Ashley Block, who is studying kinesiology at the University of

Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Photos by Sam Arendt and Bill Schanen IV