

SCHOOL DISTRICT SUCCESS STORY



SUMMARY:

Lawrence USD 497 worked with the Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition (KBC) to implement a districtwide policy to formalize their support for their employees who breastfeed. The school district moved to a proactive approach to providing support to breastfeeding staff which has previously been provided upon employee request. USD 497 is building a culture that supports breastfeeding employees to be able to return to work with ease and reach their breastfeeding goals. USD 497 has secured their position in the community as a family-friendly employer and improved the health of their employees and their employees' children along the way.

"It is vital for a school district to support nursing mothers. Kids are our business. We know that the benefits of breastfeeding extend well beyond basic nutrition. In addition to containing essential vitamins and nutrients, breast milk is also packed with disease-fighting agents that protect the baby from illness. We are a business comprised of a large number of women. It is our hope that by providing a plan and a safe place for our new mothers, they will feel supported and comfortable in order to balance the care for their children while continuing their career."

Denise Johnson
District Wellness Coordinator
Lawrence USD 497

CHALLENGE:

Reducing costs while continuing to support staff is a concern for most Unified School Districts. Districts are looking for innovative strategies to address the following costly human resource expenses.

- **Turnover of quality faculty and staff**— many school districts are faced each year with replacing quality teachers and key staff members who did not return from maternity leave because they didn't know if they could manage returning to work and continuing to provide breast milk for their baby. Replacing teachers and staff takes time and resources away from the classroom.
- **Absenteeism**— finding last-minute coverage for an employee or teacher who has called in with a sick child is problematic for districts, not to mention the resources it takes away from the classroom.
- **Rising healthcare costs**— rising health care costs are a concern for all employers and school districts are no exception. Many districts are looking for ways to reduce costs.
- **Recruitment of high-quality faculty and staff**— districts are looking for low-cost easy-to-implement strategies to attract quality teachers and staff in a competitive job market.

Districts are also struggling to provide consistent, district-wide support for their breastfeeding staff, which is effective at reducing the HR costs above. A 2017 survey of over 160 Kansas school districts showed most left the matter to building administrators to provide accommodations when asked for them by breastfeeding staff. This informal "when she asks" approach presents the following challenges:

- *Missed opportunities for providing support.* Some employees simply will not ask due to embarrassment or not wanting to ask for what they perceive as special accommodations.
- *Inconsistent implementation.* Dependent upon informed and supportive building administrators and supervisors.

SOLUTION:

The district wellness coordinator was responsible for the implementation of the district's lactation support policy. She asked the wellness coordinator in each of USD 497's 25 buildings to send photos of the spaces they had identified that were suitable for pumping. These photos are shared on the district's employee website to allow traveling employees to locate the lactation spaces in any USD 497 building. Creative use of spaces was the key to finding a place in each building for employees to pump, and in most cases empty offices, conference rooms and classrooms were often used by employees for pumping.

The Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition (KBC) helped USD 497 develop a communication flow chart to manage the seamless support for breastfeeding employees from their initial FMLA meeting through their first month back at work. The district's policy is communicated to new hires at orientation and is a part of their employee benefits and wellness webpages. Since USD 497 is a large district with over 1,800 employees in 25 buildings, it was important that they developed a communication plan that included HR staff, building administrators and building-level wellness coordinators. Handouts about the new policy were created for building administrators to use who may not be comfortable discussing breastfeeding with employees.

The WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor from the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department provided support and connection to local breastfeeding resources. The local health department will continue to provide support to school district employees who need help with breastfeeding.

RESULTS:

Lawrence USD 497 can expect a 3:1 return on investment in supporting their breastfeeding employees based on results from other industries through the following evidence-based savings:

- **Lower Absenteeism Rates**—One-day absences to care for sick children occur more than twice as often for mothers of formula feeding infants¹. Mothers and fathers of breastfed infants typically spend more time at work rather than taking time off to care for sick children.
- **Higher Retention Rates**—A study² of several companies with lactation support programs showed that they retained 94.2 percent of their employees after maternity leave, compared with the national average of only 59 percent.
- **Lower Healthcare Costs**—Breastfeeding provides protection against breast cancer, ovarian cancer and type 2 diabetes³. It is also associated with improved maternal mental health. The insurance company CIGNA conducted a two-year study of 343 employees who participated in their lactation support program, and found that the program resulted in an annual savings of \$240,000 in health care expenses, 62 percent fewer prescriptions, and a \$60,000 savings in reduced absenteeism rates⁴.
- **Improved Recruitment**—women seeking employment consider workplace lactation support an attractive employee benefit. Over 88 percent of women in Kansas choose to breastfeed and they are looking for employers who support that decision.



Broken Arrow Elementary School,
Space for pumping, USD 497

Not only does a workplace lactation support policy save school districts money and improve the health and wellbeing of their employees, it's the law. The Fair Labor Standards Act requires employers to provide reasonable break time and a private, non-bathroom place to pump for their non-exempt employees. Having a written policy can help school districts comply with the federal law on this issue.

Lawrence USD 497 received the Gold-level Breastfeeding Employee Support Award in 2018 from the KBC in recognition of their comprehensive support of their breastfeeding employees.

Their commitment to supporting breastfeeding employees goes beyond the importance of breastfeeding and staff support: it is an investment in the health of the community.



SUSTAINING SUCCESS:

Having a written districtwide policy is key to the sustainability and success of the school district's lactation support program.

A written policy ensures:

- All district leaders, now and in the future, will have a clear understanding of how to support breastfeeding employees and will be able to continue the excellent work that has been started.
- Consistent support will be offered to all employees who breastfeed within the district. When implementation is left solely to individual building administrators who may or may not be knowledgeable about the needs of breastfeeding employees, support may be inadequate.
- Employees will be proactively informed of the district's support accommodations, avoiding the "when she asks" approach and increasing the likelihood that breastfeeding staff will access these resources.

The KBC commits to helping all Kansas school districts to implement a lactation support program and join the growing list of award-winning districts in our state. The KBC has created the following resources to help school districts based on work with over 15 districts.

- Employee Handbook language
- Communication flow charts
- Posters for breakrooms
- New hire orientation materials
- Handouts for building administrators



Free State High School Lactation
Room, USD 497

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY:

- Adopt a written policy or procedure to support breastfeeding employees. Add it to the employee handbook.
- Communicate the policy to women during the maternity leave meeting—don't wait for the employee to ask for accommodations.
- Be creative to find coverage when needed for employees needing to take time to pump during the workday.
- Gain knowledge of resources available for breastfeeding women within your community. Share them with your expecting coworkers.

¹ Cohen R, Mrtek MB & Mrtek RG. (1995). Comparison of breast of maternal absenteeism and infant illness rates among milk expression among working mothers enrolled in an breastfeeding and formula-feeding women in two corporations. employer-sponsored lactation program. Pediatric Nursing, American Journal of Health Promotion, 10 (2), 148-153.

² Ortiz J., McGilligan K., Kelly P. (2004). Duration of breast milk expression among working mothers enrolled in an employer-sponsored lactation program. Pediatr Nurs; 30:111-119.

³ Victora, Cesar G et al., Breastfeeding in the 21st century: epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect, The Lancet, Volume 387, Issue 10017, 475 - 490

⁴ Dickson V, Hawkes C, Slusser W, Lange L, & Cohen R. male-focused breastfeeding promotion corporate lactation (2000). The positive impact of a corporate lactation program on breastfeeding initiation and duration rates: help for the working mother. Unpublished manuscript. Presented at the Annual Seminar for Physicians, co-sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and La Leche League International, on July 21, 2000.



Kansas
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