

Engaging Father Figures in School Health Initiatives



Along with serving as lifelong role models, **father figures can significantly influence children's healthy behaviors** and have reported that they feel responsible for teaching their children healthy eating and physical activity habits.

Evidence has linked school-based family engagement with several benefits for children and adolescents (e.g., higher academic achievement, more healthy behaviors), however, **fathers are often underrepresented in school wellness initiatives.**

Below are some research-backed strategies for **including father figures in family engagement efforts that will positively impact students** by creating opportunities to learn from the unique perspectives of their male role models.

Gather input from father figures

through conversations, surveys and focus groups, and use that information to plan events that align with schedules and interests.

Collect contact information for and directly invite father figures

to participate in wellness events/committees.

Bonus: Have invitations come from teachers or students.

Offer some activities and programs specifically for father figures

and encourage men/male caregivers on staff to help with program delivery.

Incorporate hands-on, interactive learning opportunities into activities and events for father figures

Bonus: Engage father figures and their children in these activities together.

Recognize father involvement in health initiatives

and reinforce the positive impact father figures have on their children and the community.

Insights from fathers and school leaders

Adams 12 Five Star Schools in Colorado has hundreds of fathers, uncles and grandfathers volunteer as part of their schools' Dads of Great Students program. The father-led program provides opportunities for father figures to read with students, supervise students at recess, and engage with all kids across the school building.

"We have fathers in our school almost every day! It's a tremendously positive program."

-Marie McKenzie, Principal at Meridian Elementary School



"As a kid, my dad always coached my sports teams, in high school and college he showed up to just about all my games regardless of how far the drive was, knowing he had to get up for work at 5am the next day.

Like the old sports adage goes, 'the best ability is availability,' so I work hard to be present for my kids as best I can physically, emotionally, and spiritually."

- Jason Geering, Healthier Generation staff member and father of three



Clark Elementary in Cleveland Metropolitan School District offers a father-daughter dance that students and their families enjoy.

"Encouraging both students and their families to engage in regular activity promotes physical well-being, social engagement opportunities and positive mental health."

-Cathy Speas, teacher at Clark Elementary

