

WELCOME TO

# Pottstown School District

In the economically challenged town of Pottstown, Pennsylvania, located 40 miles from Philadelphia, the number of students in public school has steadily dropped over the last decade.

With about 20,000 residents, Pottstown has a small-town atmosphere, yet its schools serve a diverse population of 3,200 students who are 46 percent white, 41 percent African American, and 10 percent Latino—and the percentage of Latino students has doubled over the last five years.

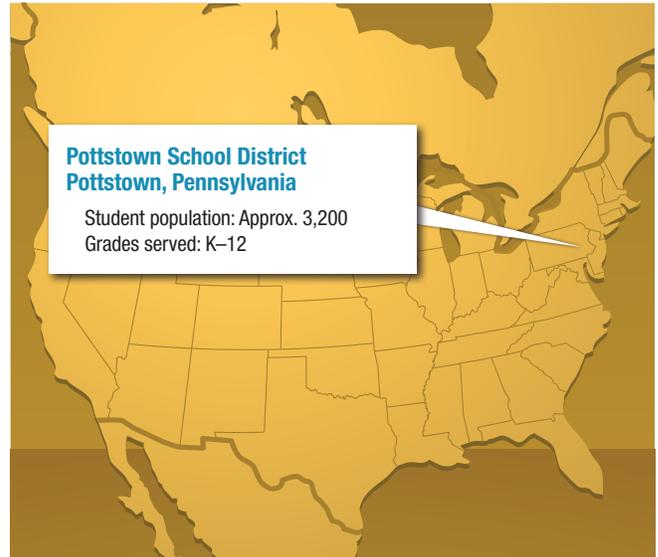
At the elementary school level, the district serves a growing number of students who need special education services: compared to 10 years ago, the number of these students has doubled to more than 200 children across five elementary schools.

## Goals and Challenges

Angela Tuck has served as principal of Edgewood Elementary School in Pottstown for nine years. Under her guidance and in collaboration with former Food Service Director Bud Heller, the school led the district in providing healthy snacks and nutrition education for its students through a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Fresh Fruit Vegetable (FFV) grant. From the beginning of the FFV program, Edgewood identified local resources for support, including a 4-H club that volunteered to help teach students how to grow their own vegetable gardens.

Edgewood's program became a catalyst for wider change at the elementary level: when the USDA grant that had initially funded Edgewood's FFV program ran out, Tuck worked with her staff to secure new funding locally. They were so successful at marshalling local resources that they were able to expand the program to Pottstown's four other elementary schools. It was during this time that Pottstown School District decided to apply to participate in ASCD's Healthy School Communities pilot study.

Not surprisingly, the initial results from ASCD's Healthy School Report Card—an integral part of Healthy School



## HEALTHY SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

The ASCD Whole Child Initiative

Communities—showed that the district, particularly the elementary schools, were adept at forging partnerships with local organizations to provide resources for new programs and initiatives. But the results of their assessment also called the administration's attention to areas that needed immediate improvement.

“When I thought about using the report card initially, I figured ‘Oh, this is just about eating healthy,’” Tuck says. “But it’s more than that. It helped us think about ‘Is our building healthy? Do our students feel safe? Are they learning? Are the teachers meeting their needs?’ It’s not just about getting a well-balanced meal; it’s about how everyone in our building is feeling and thinking.”

By considering the questions in the Healthy School Report Card and analyzing their actions, Tuck and her school's Healthy School Communities team were able to identify strategies to replicate based on their successful programs and areas that needed to improve.

For instance, they were surprised to discover that parents and students did not feel the school was as safe as it could be. Furthermore, Edgewood wasn't fully taking

advantage of opportunities to involve parents; the health team didn't have regular contact with parent-teacher organizations, nor did they ask parents to participate in health-related school programs and activities.

The elementary school team also realized the need to designate a staff member to act as the Healthy School Communities coordinator to fully integrate new initiatives across schools and ensure that they are meeting their set goals. The district's grant coordinator, who already had a full-time job, was filling this role but needed more support.

## Plan of Action

To ensure that the healthy school improvements took place across all elementary schools, the health team secured funding to hire a part-time wellness district coordinator to work in tandem with every school nurse and the district's food service director.

Staff from a local hospital also came to Edgewood Elementary School to map out and mark a mile-long walking and jogging path around the school. The goal of this project is to get parents in the habit of coming to the school with their kids and to encourage both groups to exercise regularly.

The district wellness team began a comprehensive review of safety at every school in the district, measuring asbestos and mold levels, identifying renovation needs, and developing an emergency action plan. Because the majority of local students walk to school, the team prioritized improving the lighting and accessibility of school grounds.

Lastly, the data from the Healthy School Report Card revealed that the schools could do more to integrate health education lessons into all classes and across the curriculum. In collaboration with the health team, elementary teachers found creative ways to approach this challenge and started having students write thank-you letters for the healthy snacks program and apply chart-making skills to lessons about food portions.

## The Results

What started as an isolated—yet effective—FFV program at one school ultimately grew into a districtwide initiative

at the elementary school level to improve health, well-being, and learning environments.

"I think without the grant coordinator seeking ASCD's input, it probably would have just ended in my building," Tuck says. "But because they got involved, the concept of the whole child and helping the students grow became a districtwide effort."

To build on the popular healthy snacks program, the wellness team started to offer it during after-school programs through a Community Access to Child Health grant, which is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The grant also provided resources that made it possible for after-school program coordinators to offer more organized physical activities for students.

In surveys conducted by the Pottstown elementary schools, parents reported that their children were more likely to try fruits and vegetables at home and even request them over less healthy snacks.

One of the guiding theories of ASCD's Healthy School Communities is that healthy students make better learners. In 2009, for the first time ever, every school in the Pottstown district made adequate yearly progress targets.

## Looking Ahead

Though they have expanded the healthy snacks program, adopted a wellness policy, and removed many unhealthy foods (including sodas) from all schools in the district, less nutritional options are still more prevalent in the school cafeteria than the wellness team would like. Consequently, the team is collaborating with the Food Service Department to find innovative and affordable ways to incorporate more healthy choices into lunches.

The district continues to explore possibilities for updating and remodeling its elementary and secondary schools through construction improvements and upgrades.

"The school is really the hub of the community," Tuck says. "It's the largest institution in the area that brings together people from all different walks of life. It unites them and gives us a captive audience to educate."

