



CECHCR trainings help Oakley ESD cut health care costs

Many districts, after negotiating and completing their health insurance broker contracts, file the contracts away and leave them to collect dust. One Northern California school district realized significant cost savings by revisiting its contract and utilizing tips and strategies provided by a series of Health Benefits Trainings, offered free to districts by the California Education Coalition for Health Care Reform.

Rick Rogers, superintendent of Oakley ESD, serves as his district's representative to the local Health Benefits/Joint Powers Authority Board and is a volunteer trainer for CECHCR. After participating in the CECHCR training modules, Rogers put into action the tips and strategies offered, including asking the right questions, requesting transparency in broker fees, reviewing his broker contract, and requesting a revision to the original contract to better benefit members.

"Our contract had not been reviewed since it was initially entered into four or five years ago, and we discovered (that by not monitoring our contract) we had overpaid our broker by nearly \$62,000 over the last three years," Rogers said.

The free trainings are sponsored by CECHCR, a grant-funded coalition comprising management and labor organizations in the public education sector. They have joined together to improve health care quality and reduce costs in public education by empowering districts to make smarter health care choices through access to critical information and tools.

Rogers said the CECHCR trainings proved valuable because they help district purchasers become more educated and informed about the health care decisions they must make for their employees.

For example, trainings cover practical information on health care related topics and trends, such as understanding the root causes of skyrocketing costs that help dispel misconceptions, and how to negotiate the best coverage at the lowest cost for district employees. They provide model contracts and offer information including explanation of health care costs, comparative data on cost and quality, accessing the Healthy Families program and how to stay informed on health care reform efforts.

These facts and data help shed light on the complex maze of health benefit issues, so districts can leverage their knowledge to identify solutions that improve services and save money.

The severity of the health care crisis combined with escalating costs is having a devastating effect on public education. In fact, health care costs for California's classified staff members increased by 143 percent between 2000 and 2006, while their wages increased by 24 percent. Teachers in California spent \$348 million dollars for the cost of health care not covered by districts in 2007-08.

Rogers said that CECHCR's mission of management and labor joining together to address health care helps eliminate it as a wedge issue, so they may work together more effectively to impact rising health care costs on the local level, and as a society.

"I've enjoyed being a part of a group like CECHCR that is pushing in a direction I philosophically and personally believe in, particularly as we face a hugely broken health care system," Rogers said.

CECHCR members include ACSA, California Association of School Business Officials, California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, California Federation of Teachers, California School Boards Association, California School Employees Association, California Teachers Association, Community College League of California, and School Employers Association of California.

Ruben Ingram, executive director of the School Employers Association of California, and Cindy Young, senior health policy advisor for the California School Employees Association serve as CECHCR co-chairs.

CECHCR offers three stand-alone modules of free training to K-12 school districts, community college districts and county offices of education, and also provides follow-up support services. For more information on CECHCR and how to sign up for its trainings, please visit www.cechcr.org or call (916) 567-9911, ext. 18.

This article was submitted by Janet Walden, president and CEO of the Center for Collaborative Solutions.

Association of California School Administrators

1029 J Street, Suite 500
Sacramento, CA 95814

Phone: 916.444.3216 | Toll-Free: 800.608.ACSA(2272) | Fax: 916.444.3739

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