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### Encouraging and Maintaining Employee Participation in the Erie County Wellness Program

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Encouraging and Maintaining Employee Participation in the Erie County Wellness Program

Cuebas, Roxanne

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for PAD 690 Masters Project

SUNY Buffalo State

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**Abstract:**

This research focused on how to encourage and maintain participation in employee wellness programs. This is an agency-based project involving the employees of the Erie County Rath Building, located in Buffalo, NY as well as other county employees located outside of the Rath Building . Wellness programs help educate individuals and improve their health. Obesity rates are currently rising and most people are not properly informed on the benefits they receive from exercising and being properly nourished. With the proper incentives and peer-support mechanisms in place, employees and employers greatly benefit from participating. Public sector employees were examined for this research using a convenience sample of Erie County employees. The final product of this research project is a set of recommendations that can be implemented by the Erie County Wellness Program.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **a. Introduction**

There is a need for worksite wellness programs because obesity has become the norm in society and obesity rates have been increasing. Cawley and Price (2013) state that in the United States obesity-related costs increase by \$190.2 billion annually. Individuals who are obese have higher medical expenditures versus those who have maintained a healthier body weight, and can increase both direct and indirect costs to employers. Obesity is also connected to \$4.3 billion in absenteeism from the work place. According to Cawley and Price, these costs may be offset by paying employees lower wages. Health promotion programs are in place to help employees lose weight and become healthier, allowing employers to save on health insurance costs and employee absenteeism costs.

Gallant and Marshall (2012) note that society has been slowly shifting into a cycle of unhealthy behaviors, which consists of lack of exercise and lack of proper nutrition. The authors state how difficult it can be to take the first initial step for a healthier change, but once that step is taken, a routine will develop. Individuals should become educated and motivated and this is more likely to happen if a support system is put in place. It is always easier to become motivated and push yourself that extra mile when you are not trying to reach specific goals alone. Gallant and Marshall further explain that teaming up with friends and/or family members who have similar goals as you do and want to take the same steps to attain these goals can be more motivating. Unfortunately, most people lack the knowledge necessary to make healthy decisions and fail to realize how a wellness program may impact their lives positively if utilized correctly. Existing wellness programs are unique in their own ways and although they resemble each other

in the main aspects of the program, they are still very different depending on the participants' needs (Gallant & Marshall, 2012).

Greene and Michaels (2013) indicate if the proper incentives are offered, employees may be more inclined to participate in workplace wellness programs. They ensure that the readers are aware that programs begin in the workplace because it is where individuals spend a vast amount of time. Studies have shown that by having employees participate in wellness programs, they are saving employer dollars in the long run as well as, becoming more motivated not just at work, but in their homes (Greene & Michaels, 2013). Unfortunately, most people do not realize the value of these programs, how they work, what they offer, and what the expected outcomes will be.

#### **b. Statement of the Problem and Purpose of Study**

Health and Wellness is an essential topic due to the magnitude of its outcomes. Unfortunately, not everyone is fully informed on how beneficial this can be to employees and employers. A good wellness program can help to establish the basic steps of bettering the health of each participant. This research helps explain the importance of exercise and nutrition, while focusing on ways to increase and maintain employee participation in wellness programs. Furthermore, this research will develop a detailed description of how to maximize the number of participants in the program, what incentives should be offered, and expected outcomes based on the program, collectively providing a better understanding of how to design a successful program.

### **c. Significance of Study**

Through this project it has become clearer on how to plan and implement a worksite wellness program, how to encourage employee participation, and which wellness classes employees are most interested in. With this research what incentives get employees to participate has been determined, who can motivate employees to participate, and reasons why employees are not always able to participate have been recognized. This study has helped others understand the benefits employers receive from offering this service and the benefits employees receive from participating.

This is an important topic to study because occupational stress can cause negative changes in one's everyday life, inside and out of the work place. By creating a recipe for better workplace wellness programs, the likelihood that employees will be interested in participating will increase. This will lead to both healthier individual lives and more productive work places.

## **Chapter II: Review of Related Literature**

### **a. Introduction**

In recent years obesity rates have been increasing. Estimates are showing that at least 68% of the adult population and about half of full time employees are overweight and/or obese (Abraham & Barleen et. al., 2011). As a result, obese individuals are at higher risk for chronic diseases such as: strokes, diabetes, cancers, heart and chronic respiratory diseases (Anderson, 2011). Chronic health conditions are caused by the choice of one's lifestyle. Substance abuse, physical inactivity, and unhealthy diets are part of one's lifestyle. Obesity has negative effects and economic effects on individuals causing them to have higher annual expenditures by 41.5% than those who are considered normal-weight (Abraham & Barleen et. al., 2011). The majority of people today do not realize the importance of proper nutrition and daily exercise. With the combination of one's everyday work schedule, family responsibilities, and other engagements, it is common to fall into an unhealthy and inactive lifestyle. Unfortunately, most people fail to understand that even if you make a few small changes in hopes to achieve a more active and healthy lifestyle; over time those changes will become a natural part of their daily routine. Furthermore, risks associated with obesity will decrease by living an active lifestyle that includes daily physical activity. Not only can physical activity help with decreasing the dangers associated with chronic diseases, but it can also help minimize depression, anxiety, medical care costs, and allow for better sleep patterns (Abraham, 2011).

There is a high demand for worksite health promotion/wellness programs. The goal of these programs is to help enhance ones' knowledge on the importance of physical activity and

proper nutrition. The work environment is the best-suited place for such programs due to the fact that individuals spend a vast amount of their time working. Abraham noted that at places of employment individuals share a common purpose within the culture, making it easier to relate to one another. As a result of this, there is not a lack of peer-to-peer encouragement and challenge between one another. The health and well-being of employees' is becoming more and more significant to employers. If an employee can feel better about their self through participation from a wellness program, they will better perform their job duties and have a more positive attitude inside and outside of the workplace (Whitehead, 2006). Additionally, Whitehead mentions, when worksites offer health services it puts their company at a lower risk for employee absenteeism and welfare problems, as well as increases productivity and improves the overall imagine for the company because workers are performing efficiently.

### **b. Review and Critique of Literature**

Ammendolla, Cancelliere, Cassidy, and Cote believe in order to have economic success and good population health; the work force needs to consist of a healthy population, which can then lead to higher productivity rates. If a worker is ill, it will only lead to lower productivity rates because they cannot perform to their full potential. Absenteeism and Presenteeism are two terms that can be used to describe what actually happens in a work place when workers are not feeling well. The authors further explain that absenteeism describes missed workdays due to employee illness or disability. Presenteeism refers to a decrease in worker productivity in the workplace before and after illness (Ammendolla et al., 2011). Presenteeism is what happens when a worker is physically at work, but is not able to perform their required duties during a specific time frame (Ammendolla et al., 2011).

Health promotion in the work place is described as, "preventing, minimizing, and eliminating health hazards and maintaining and promoting work ability" (Ammendolla et al., 2011). To maintain worker health and wellness it is important to have an even balance physically, mentally, and socially, as well as, maintaining oneself in good physical condition (Ammendolla et al., 2011).

Typically when a workplace supports wellness programs they will provide their employees with exercise facilities or time off to participate in physical activity (Goetzel & Pronk, 2010). Healthy food choices in vending machines and offering incentives to those who participate in the employee wellness programs are other forms of health promotion in the workplace (Goetzel & Pronk, 2010). Smoke-free and mandatory employee seatbelt use while operating a company vehicle policies are examples of simple and easy to follow regulations that promote a healthier workplace. Many worksite wellness programs may also include extra motivators to ensure that employees are physically active. This may include, providing employees with educational information to maintain healthy diets (Goetzel & Pronk, 2010).

Health promotion programs can be classified as a very broad term that has many different meanings among society. Gebhardt and Crump explain that there are three different levels and types of fitness and wellness programs. Level one is mainly about raising awareness among participants (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990). These awareness programs include educational classes, screening classes, health fairs, newsletters, posters, and flyers (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990). Although these programs will not directly improve one's health or behavior change, it is a start to inform individuals of possible consequences from bad habits (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990).

Gebhardt and Crump explain level two programs in detail. They mention these programs focus more on life-style change by providing specific programs like, strength training, back training, and cardio build-up, that are either given during a certain time frame or are offered consistently throughout the year. Most sessions can last anywhere from eight to twelve weeks, but some programs can be ongoing. Employees need to be fully involved in order to reach their goals. New health habits can be accomplished through this program. Different techniques are in place to encourage a shift in ones behavior. Level two programs are very informational and help assist workers in changing their negative behaviors into positive ones. Some examples that Gebhardt and Crump provide us with for level two programs by employers are, fitness programs that are self-administered, memberships at local fitness centers, classes for balancing demanding work tasks, and fitness classes that inform participants on specific exercises that will help maintain their body at a healthy weight.

Level three programs want to create an atmosphere that will help individuals maintain what they have worked so hard for (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990). This program will encourage them to continue on healthy paths and to maintain their behaviors. Level three programs that are offered at the workplace generally take place at their fitness center (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990). Not every workplace can afford a fitness center, so programs are provided through available resources. These programs offer different equipment or the necessary space needed in order to assist employees in continuing with their healthy life-style (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990).

One of the pioneers in health promotion, Johnson & Johnson provided all three levels of the programs and it was shown that these programs lowered health care costs, helped increase fitness, and decreased the chances of encountering any health related risk factors among their employees (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990). Through level one programs, health screenings and

information on fitness and healthy behaviors were offered (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990). Level two and three programs also provided health screenings, but they also offered fitness programs at other workout centers if they did not have space in the workplace for it. Smoking cessation programs, nutrition programs, weight control, blood pressure control, and stress management were also a few informational classes that were offered.

In order to have successful employee wellness programs each must consist of an identifiable relationship between the program and business objectives, support from those who are in higher positions of the company, and useful planning techniques (Goetzel & Pronk, 2012). It is also essential that each program use employee feedback in order to develop the program goals and objectives, while providing individuals with the different options the program offers. Additionally, incentives are important to have, as these will encourage participation. Incentives are in place to give that extra boost of encouragement. It gives participants something to work towards. It has also been mentioned that incentives can help people with busy schedules stay committed to their diet and exercise plans (Cawley & Price, 2013). Good communication between participants and developers and a thorough evaluation of the program will also ensure higher participation rates (Goetzel & Prink, 2010).

To guarantee the maximum amount of participants, employee needs must be met through each program (Churchill & Gillespie, 2014). In order to ensure that needs are being met, assessments must be constantly performed along with frequent reevaluations (Churchill & Gillespie, 2014). If an agency can understand what their employees need, they can provide an environment that will help them reach their goals (Churchill & Gillespie, 2014). Employers should be concerned about their employees' health because employees are said to be the most

important asset to an organization (Thygeson, 2010). Their well-being and productivity are necessary for proper performance and profitability within the organization (Thygeson, 2010).

When management supports the initiative of their wellness program it has shown to be more effective as proven by participation rates (Churchill & Gillespie, 2014). Incentives may consist of many different offerings, but they all have one thing in common, to encourage employee participation. Some incentives may consist of, cash rewards, gift cards and discounted insurance premiums (Churchill & Gillespie, 2014). Additional incentives may include, free or half priced memberships for health clubs, which also encourages employees to get active (DeVries, 2010). Smaller rewards such as, water bottles, relaxation CDs, t-shirts, and healthy snacks have also been proven to attract employee attention to these programs (DeVries, 2010).

Worksite wellness programs can be implemented in organizations that want to incorporate the importance of health into their work curriculum. Organizations that aspire to have wellness programs as an option to employees generally have the lowest rates in employee call offs and the most improved rates in worker performance (Schmidt, 2012). Employee wellness programs have nothing but positive effects on employees and employers.

Employees benefit from the programs because they will be more productive at work, they have a lower chance of becoming ill, and they will have a more positive outlook on life (Schmidt, 2012). Employers benefit from the programs because their employees overall productivity rates will improve, which is a reflection of the company (Schmidt, 2012). Not only does productivity increase, but also employers will save money on health insurance coverage, because their employees are missing less days of work (Schmidt, 2012). Incentives will encourage employee participation and will help produce the highest amount of participants in the

program (Schmidt, 2012). It has been noted that incentives that are in place to track ones progress are more encouraging than the ones that target how much weight one has lost (Schmidt, 2012). It is believed that targeting ones progress on their health behaviors instead of outcomes is fairer to participants (Schmidt, 2012). Healthy eating and the promotion of physical activity will help decrease the rates of those with bad health conditions due to inactivity and poor nutrition (Schmidt, 2012).

There was a work-site wellness needs assessment study done to pin point reasons that employees participate in work-site wellness programs (Arvin, Geshnizjani, Middlestadt. Sheats, Sullivan, 2011). This study consisted of 279 employees that were employed by Midwestern University (Middlestadt & Sheats, et. al., 2011). Through this survey ones health status, health behaviors, and reasons for participation were all determined (Middlestadt & Sheats, et. al., 2011). Questions of intent were asked to figure out how many employees were actually considering participating (Middlestadt & Sheats, et. al., 2011). Some questions asked how likely it was that the employee would participate in a wellness program offered through their employer within a twelve month period, if employers offered wellness programs after work hours how likely were they to participate, and if employers offered wellness programs during work hours how likely were they to participate (Middlestadt & Sheats, et. al., 2011). To determine employees attitudes two questions were asked, would it be a good or bad decision to participate in a wellness program during the course of the next twelve months if offered by your employer and would it be wise or foolish to participate in a wellness program during the course of the next twelve months if offered by your employer (Middlestadt & Sheats, et. al., 2011). Many other questions were asked about participants' family members and their perception of them taking part in a work-site wellness program (Middlestadt & Sheats, et. al., 2011). Results showed that

68.6% of employees had all intentions to participate in a work-site wellness program if offered within the next twelve months by their employer and for this case the employer is the actual University (Middlestadt & Sheats, et. al., 2011). It was also noted that intention rates were higher among younger employees (Middlestadt & Sheats, et. al., 2011). Those who had the intentions to participate believed the program would help them lose weight, improve their health, assist them in becoming physically active, reduce their stress, help their bonds with their coworkers, assist in the development of better eating habits, and become more productive at work (Middlestadt & Sheats, et. al., 2011).

The Men's Health Network has put in place a successful workplace wellness program that consists of the Congressional Men's Health Screenings Event (CMHS) (Bruno & William, 2007). This is an event that takes place every year after Father's Day (Bruno & William, 2007). This event helps raise awareness on one's overall health to improve the quality of their own life and their families' lives (Bruno & William, 2007). Screenings, health education materials, and the opportunity for both men and women to talk to health care professionals are provided through this program (Bruno & William, 2007). The health screenings provided are on blood pressure, weight, body fat assessment, cholesterol, glucose levels, and osteoporosis, just to name a few (Bruno & William, 2007).

Self- assessment quizzes are available for registered participants allowing them the option to choose what test they would prefer to have performed (Bruno & William, 2007). Different stations were set up and participants proceeded to the station of their choice for specific tests (Bruno & William, 2007). Test results were given right away in paper form and later explained by a health educator (Bruno & William, 2007). It was encouraged to seek further medical advice if results were not positive (Bruno & William, 2007).

There were 760 people ages 18 to 79 that attended the screenings event, which is a rate of about 33 people per hour. Of those who attended 83.7% were male and 16.3% were female (Bruno & William, 2007). Some of the results indicated that 75% of participants had cholesterol readings under 200, which is a desirable level. On the other hand, 18% had a reading anywhere from 200 to 239, which is classified as borderline high, while 7% had a reading of over 240 classifying them at the highest and unhealthy level (Bruno & William, 2007). Further results indicated that 65% of participants' blood pressure readings were considered normal and even less than 120/80, 24% were in the pre-hypertension stage, 11% were already in the hypertension stage (Bruno & William, 2007).

Evaluations and feedback from programs are needed for program improvements as well as building the program effectively (Dilworth et.al., 2013). The only way to improve a program is most certainly by follow-up education that can be effective for participants (Thygeson, 2010). The follow-up process is evidenced-based and helps track behavior change (Thygeson, 2010). Evaluations from this event were very positive (Bruno & William, 2007). Participants made comments on how quick and convenient the tests were and how friendly staff was (Bruno & William, 2007). Some participants knew they needed to get these tests done, but never took the time to actually do so (Bruno & William, 2007). Attending this event encouraged them to seek preventive care and become informed on their health (Bruno & William, 2007). Others mentioned switching up their diets based on the screening results and chose to lead a healthier life (Bruno & William, 2007).

To have a successful wellness program five components must be combined (Thygeson, 2010). The first one being an easy to understand evidenced-based and a valid health assessment that takes into account cost and productivity (Thygeson, 2010). The second component consists

of strong benefit incentives that will encourage employee participation (Thygeson, 2010). The third one would be promotion of the program, fourth would be, follow-ups on participants progress and their behavior change (Thygeson, 2010). The last component is strong leadership and program management because if the management team encourages staff and leads by example, participation rates will increase (Thygeson, 2010).

Whitehead mentions what he thinks should be the basic requirements for worksite wellness programs. He thinks it is significant to have senior managers that have the drive to implement an employee wellness program. The senior managers have more experience when it comes to their organizations making it easier for them to implement the program. Managers have two roles in these programs, to promote and participate (Kishchuk et. al., 2008). When managers participate in the programs they offer positive influence over employee participation (Olson, 2009). Manager participation in a wellness program is highly encouraged because they can approve budgets, they are able to assist in implementing the program, serve as role models, and can encourage participation through effective communication styles with their staff members (Olson, 2009). There also needs to be committed participants as well as organizational involvement (Whitehead, 2006). Support from the corporate environment and organizations are necessary to have if a successful program is in the plans (Whitehead, 2006). One last basic requirement that Whitehead also mentions is the importance of knowing how to deal with the different problems that may occur with participants' health and their behaviors.

It is not so much a challenge for organizations to offer wellness programs, as it is to figure out how to design and target a program that will implement long-term effectiveness (Haynes & Helms, 2001). It is vital to design a program that will be beneficial to all participants and the organization as a whole (Haynes & Helms, 2001). Knowing the needs of participants is

necessary especially if organizations want to offer a benefits package that will help attract employee attention (Haynes & Helms, 2001). Having a wellness program in place is not enough to get others to participate in the program, although it will spark their interest (Haynes & Helms, 2001). If an organization wants to encourage on-going participation it is necessary to design new motivating ideas targeting the specific audience, while offering incentives as an added bonus (Haynes & Helms, 2001). The success of a program will greatly depend on how well it meets the needs and interests of its participants (DeMoranville, 1998).

If an individual feels more susceptible to risk, chances are they will be more likely to participate in the program and more motivated to change their unhealthy behaviors (Olson, 2009). It is important for employees to identify their health risks because it will help them determine whether they would like to participate in the program or not (Olson, 2009). Employees might not feel as inclined to participate if they don't think their health issue is of any serious concern at the time (Olson, 2009).

### **c. Summary**

The literature explains worksite wellness programs are the most effective way to reach the target audience because individuals spend the majority of their time in the work place. Employees benefit greatly from wellness programs because it not only helps them to remain active, but their productivity rates in the work place increase as well. If productivity rates are increasing, that is a positive reflection of the organization that employees currently work for. Employers will also save money because employees are showing up to work, which means they do not have to lose money by paying for sick time. Employees develop positive attitudes from the program, which not only helps them in the work place, but with their personal lives as well.

To have a better chance of a successful employee wellness program, senior managers are encouraged to promote and participate in the program. Incentives will have a positive influence on employee participation because it gives the employees something to work towards. Incentives can be anything as small as a granola bar, other healthy snacks, or t-shirts, gift cards or something more substantial such as lower insurance premiums for those who participate. Furthermore, evaluations during and after a program is completed is a necessary factor when making decisions geared towards improvement. Feedback from participants is essential in order to make changes for the better of the program, employees, and the employer.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

This was an agency-based project with Erie County. It was determined through their employees, which incentives help to ensure the maximum amount of participation in the employee wellness program. Peer-support mechanisms also have an effect on how many participants there are, because most people need that extra motivational factor. Other factors that encourage employee participation have been examined.

#### **a. Design of Study**

This research focused on ways to encourage and maintain employee participation in wellness programs. Given what the literature told us about participation in wellness programs, there are many ways to determine what employers can do to design a program that will increase the likelihood of participation. This was an agency-based project completed under the supervision of the Erie County Department of Personnel, in partnership with the Department of Senior Services and the Health Department. This study featured a cross-sectional research design using a survey designed by the Erie County Wellness Committee. The dependent variable is participation in wellness programs. The independent variables include familiarity with program offerings, staff opinions on current offerings, and attitudes on incentives. The survey also included several control variables, including age, gender, work location and, pay grade, which provides data for future analyses by the agency.

#### **b. Sample Selection**

The population being examined is public sector employees. The study employed a convenience sample, randomly drawn from Erie County employees stationed at the Rath Building in Buffalo, NY, as well as other locations throughout Erie County. All county

departments were canvassed and information on the number of employees in each department was provided to the Wellness Committee. Surveys were divided up into specific amounts in accordance with the department. Assigned members of the Wellness Committee distributed surveys to different departments. The surveys were administered to those employees who were available to complete the survey during the time frame given, which was normally about two days. Some departments took longer than other departments to complete the survey.

### **c. Data Collection Methods**

Data was collected through original survey questions specific to the study. The agency had a strong desire to do an original survey because it made it possible to direct the questions towards the specific wellness program they offer. The Wellness Committee had a few meetings where the purpose of the program was discussed as well as, what they wanted to find out about employees. Needs of employees were also of concern and taken into consideration when deciding what questions would be on the survey. Members of the committee were able to come up with questions that would determine what would encourage employees to participate in a wellness program, what incentives would give them more motivation to participate, what fitness classes they would prefer to take, and what healthy food options they would choose.

This study began with focus-group discussions with the Erie County Wellness Committee. During these meetings ideas were tossed back and forth between members. One of the first things discussed was what the mission for this wellness program is. The mission is to empower employees to make positive lifestyle choices. Secondly, it was important to target employee needs, goals, and desires through this wellness program. It was decided the only way to give employees what they want is to find out specifically what it is that they want to achieve

and what would encourage them to participate in wellness programs. Third, it was essential to find out if employees heard of the wellness program, what it offers, what activities they would be interested in, and what incentives would be the reason they would be more likely to participate. These unanswered questions made it necessary to develop a survey that would help gather all this information.

After the first meeting a draft survey was made that was emailed to each member of the committee allowing them to view it, ask questions if necessary, change questions that were in the survey, and give their overall input on the survey. Once the feedback was received changes were made to the first draft survey and redistributed through email to the Wellness Committee for approval. Once the final survey was designed it was necessary to have Commissioner David Palmer review it and provide the final approval before distributing the surveys to different departments in Erie County.

The survey was designed to help the Department of Personnel better understand what affects Erie County employees' likelihood of participating in the Erie County Wellness Program. The final instrument included indicators for several independent variables that can impact the likelihood of participation were included in the survey, and fall into one of four categories—familiarity, convenience and comfort, organizational culture, and the use of incentives.

Questions in the survey are in place to find out how familiar employees are with the wellness program that is offered through their employer. If an employee isn't aware of programs and activities that are offered, chances are they will not participate. They will not even consider participating because they do not know these specific programs exist.

Convenience of the program plays a huge factor in employees deciding whether to participate or not. Time of day, location, and comfort of the room will be considered when employees are contemplating participating. The more convenient these factors are for employees, the higher the likelihood of participation.

Comfort is essential for participants, because if an individual does not feel comfortable when working out, they will not reach their full potential, making it harder to track results. The organizational culture should be one that encourages and promotes healthy behavior as well as participation in employee wellness programs. Lack of peer-support will only increase the likelihood of employees declining to participate. It is important to have managers who not only promote healthy behaviors and the program, but ones who also take part in participating. The control variables of this study are gender, age, work location, and pay grade.

The use of incentives helps to encourage employees to participate in wellness programs. Incentives differ from program to program and change depending on what the employer can offer to their employees. Incentives can consist of healthy snacks, t-shirts, CDs, or lower insurance premiums for those who participate in the program.

These four factors have been identified through the literature. Familiarity with the program has not only been stated in the literature, but it is a suspected factor through members of the Wellness Committee. These members strongly agree that employees who are not informed on programs offered through employers have a very slim chance of participating.

#### **d. Data Analysis**

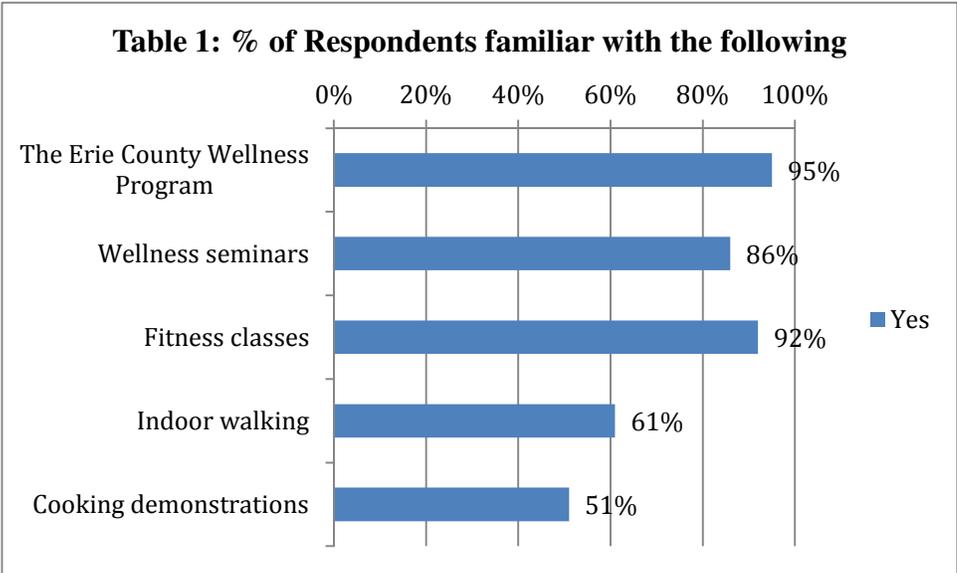
Data was analyzed through a program called Auto Data. Auto Data produces paper survey instruments that can be scanned to facilitate data collection. Once the data is scanned it is

stored in a Microsoft Access database. Auto Data is able to generate frequency tables and cross-tabulations. The data is exportable to Excel and able to be imported into SPSS for advanced statistical functions. Erie County requested only simple descriptive statistics for this project, primarily the frequency distribution for each question. The County reserves ownership over the data, and may produce further analyses once enough data is available. For the purposes of presentation, the County requested that results be presented in the form of bar charts so that comparisons could be easily made.

**Chapter IV: Discussion**

For a full set of frequencies refer to Appendix B. There were a total of 165 county employees who participated in the Erie County Wellness survey at the time of this report. Unfortunately, there were some non-responses and per question respondents ranged from 160-165. These employees were from several /Erie County departments including Senior Services, Mental Health, Environmental Planning, Taxation, Department of Health, and Board of Elections.

About 43% of men completed the survey and 57% of women completed the survey. The survey began with questions on familiarity with the classes offered through the wellness program for Erie County Employees. Results showed that 95% of employees were aware of the free classes and other wellness activities that were offered to them. Only 5% of respondents were not aware of such programs.



Although, many employees are informed of the wellness activities that are offered, it was necessary to ask which classes they remember hearing about. This question would help to address where the focus for program promotion should be. As shown in Table 1, Wellness seminars on nutrition and other topics were remembered by 86% of the respondents.

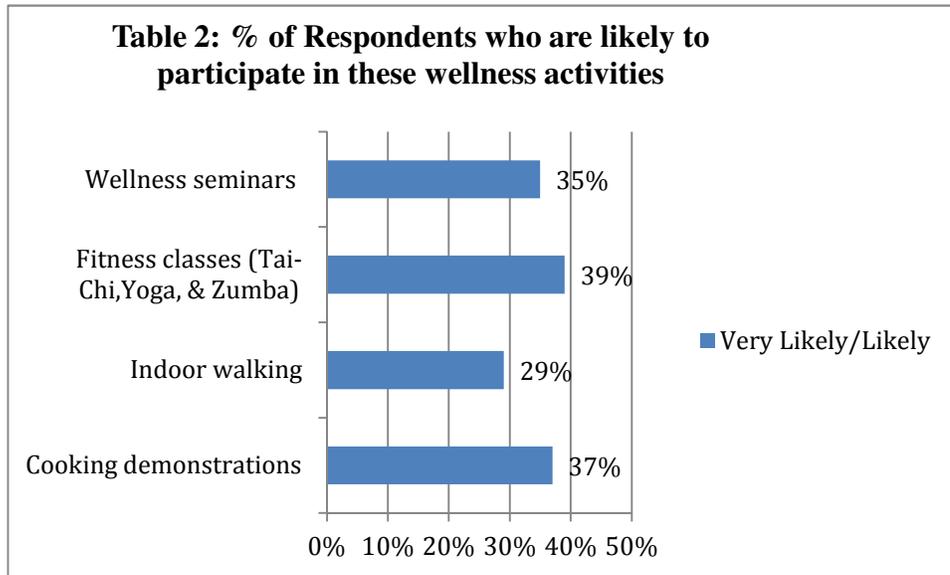
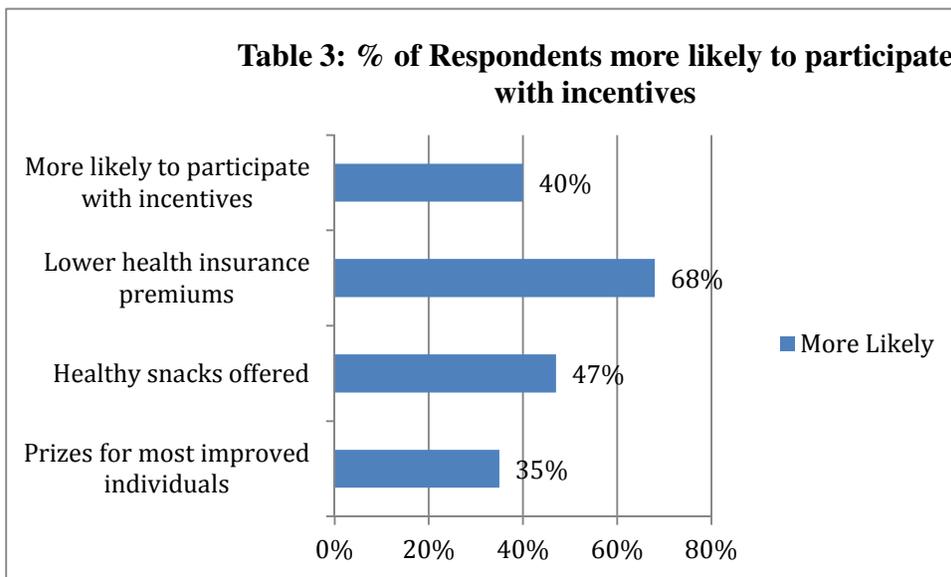


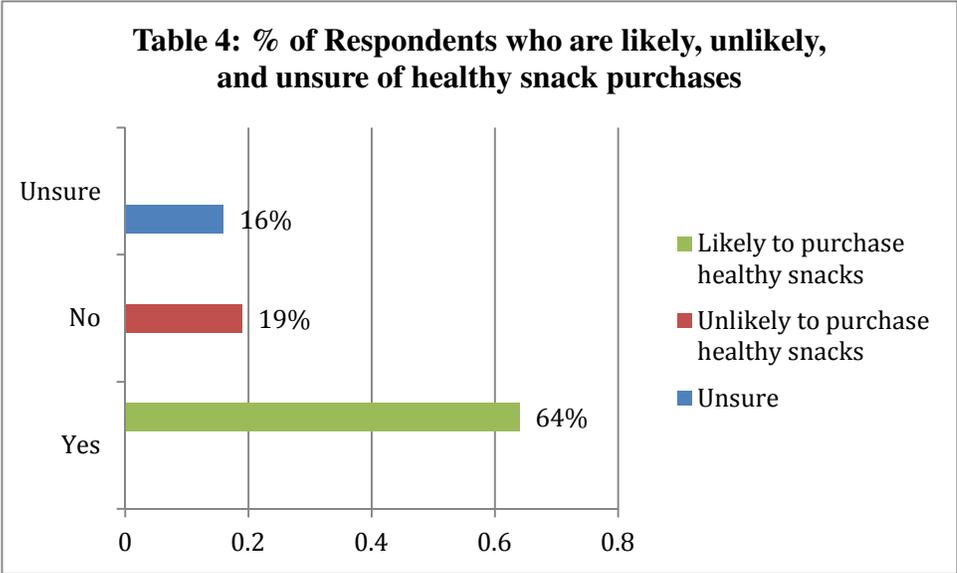
Table 2 questions aimed to determine how likely the employees are to participate in the different activities that are currently offered. The activities consisted of wellness seminars, fitness classes, indoor walking, and cooking demonstrations. About 35% of respondents were likely to participate in wellness seminars. The results for how likely respondents would be to participate in a fitness class like Tai Chi, Yoga, or Zumba displayed at 39%. Indoor walking results consisted of 29% likely to participate and lastly, 37% of respondents are likely to participate in cooking demonstrations.

Over all, participants would be more willing to participate in a fitness class versus wellness seminars, indoor walking, and cooking demonstrations. This shows that respondents rather be in a faster paced environment when it comes to a fitness class.

Incentives are in place to offer a motive for participating. Out of the 161 respondents to this specific question, 65 respondents or 40% said if the Erie County Wellness Program offered incentives they would be more likely to participate. Fifty-two survey participants or 32% said they would not be more likely to participate with incentives being offered. Forty-four participants or 27% said they were not sure if incentives would encourage them to participate in the Erie County Wellness Program.

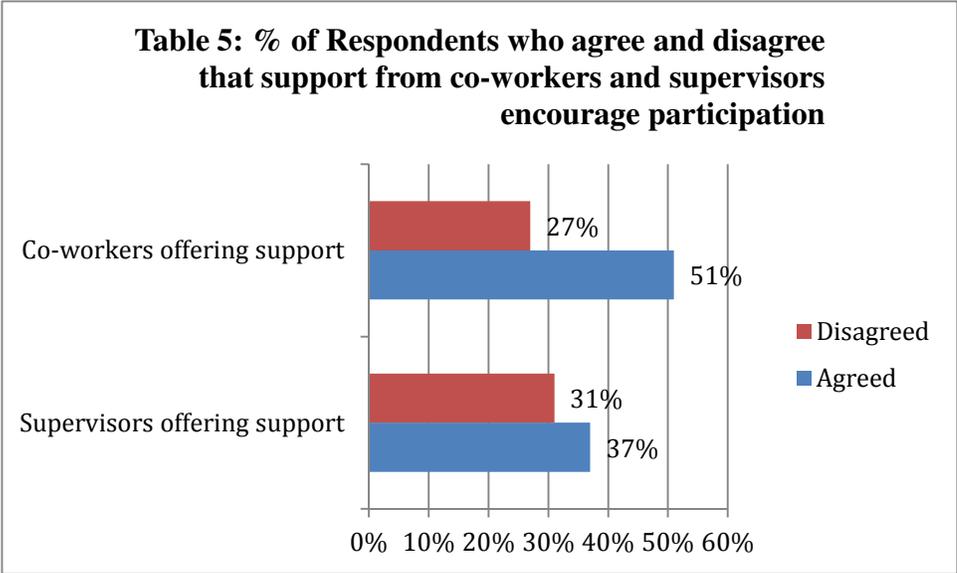


The survey mentioned three types of incentives, lower insurance premiums, healthy snacks offered throughout the work day, and prizes for most improved individuals. According to Table 3 there was a total of 68% between those who would be likely to participate in the wellness program if lower health insurance premiums were offered. There were 47% of respondents who would consider participating in the wellness program if healthy snacks were offered throughout their workday. Prizes for most improved individuals would encourage about 35% of respondents to participate in the wellness program. Offering lower insurance premiums is of most interest to employees versus the other previously mentioned options.



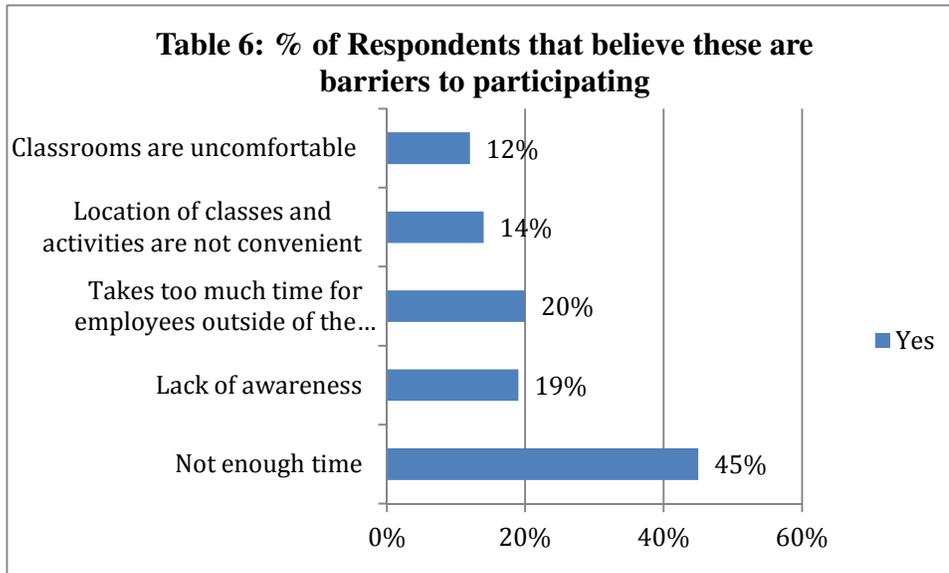
Sixty-four percent of respondents (Refer to Table 4) confirmed if healthy snacks were offered in the workplace for a low cost such as, low-fat yogurt, granola bars, dried fruit and nut mix, and fresh fruit versus candy, chips, cookies, and cupcakes they would be likely to purchase the healthier option. Unfortunately, 19% still said they would be unlikely to purchase the healthier choice, leaving about 16% unsure of which choice they would make.

A total of 77% of respondents also said they would dine in an on-site cafeteria if they offered fresh salads, fruits, wraps, and other healthy lunch options. Eight percent weren't sure if they would and a total of 15% would not consider this option.



These results are the organization culture variables that were referred to in the data collection section. In reference to Table 5, co-workers offering peer-support and encouragement would increase respondents' chance of participating in the wellness activities. About 51% of respondents would agree with that statement and 27% disagreed.

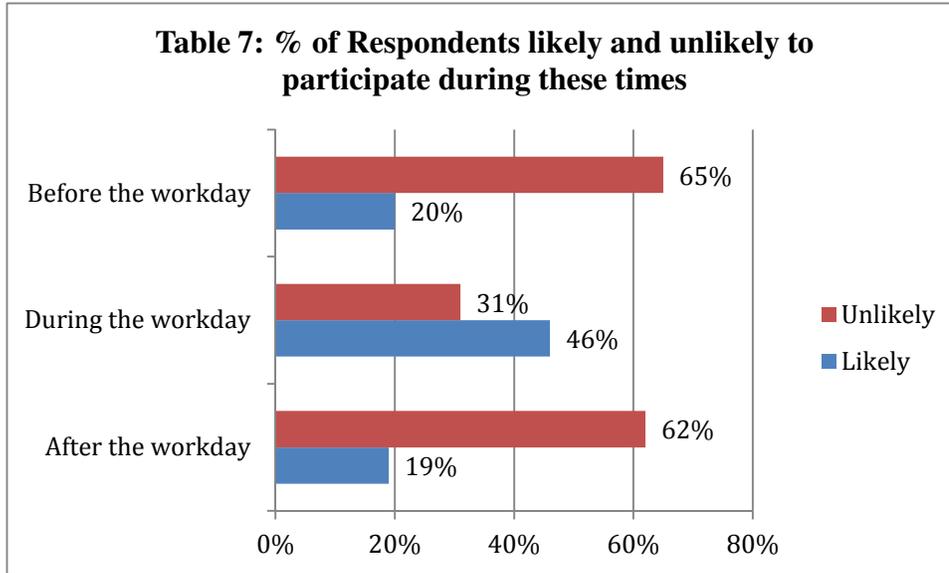
Results also showed that employees who have their supervisors and other managers offering support and encouragement would increase their chances of participating in the wellness program. About 37% of respondents would agree with this statement and 31% would disagree.



Other questions in the survey (Refer to Table 6) focused on the comfort of the program to employees as well as trying to pin point what gets in the way of employees participating in wellness programs. Respondents were asked if classroom sizes or temperatures were uncomfortable, 12% said yes to a great extent. Fourteen percent of respondents believed location of the classes and other activities are not convenient.

For workers outside of the Erie County Rath building, it may become difficult to get to classes and activities due to time constraints. In the Wellness Survey this question was addressed and results showed that 20% of respondents agreed with this question. Other employees may not participate in wellness programs because they are unaware of the activities offered. Nineteen percent of respondents agreed with this statement

It's been noted there is just not enough time in the day to schedule wellness program activities due to other commitments and responsibilities. This is by far the most often cited problem. Forty-five percent of respondents, close to half, agreed with this statement.



Refer to Table 7. Activities that are offered before the workday begins does not seem appealing to the respondents because only 20% said they would be likely to participate. On the other hand, 66% said they would be very unlikely to participate. If programs were offered during the lunch hour 46% would be more inclined to participate and 31% are unlikely to participate. When the workday ends, as suspected, most people need to get home and attend to other obligations. Only 19% would be willing to participate in a wellness program when their workday is finished and 62% said this would be very unlikely.

## **Chapter V: Implications, Conclusions, and Future Research:**

### **a. Implications of possible outcomes**

To maintain and encourage employee participation in a wellness program it is essential to first find out why employees are not participating in the wellness program offered through their employer, figure out ways to get them to participate, and become familiar with their thoughts in general.

Results showed employees do not think they have enough time in their day for a wellness program and the different activities it offers. Most respondents do not want to participate in a program before or after work. Ideally, a program offered throughout their workday is what would encourage them to actually participate.

Offering fitness classes such as yoga, zumba, and Tai Chi showed that respondents would be more likely to participate in a program if those classes were offered. Respondents displayed a great interest in activities that can get their heart rate going rather than activities that require sitting down at a desk or table listening to a verbal lecture from the instructor.

Based on results, a recommendation for the county to consider is healthy food options in the cafeteria. Seventy-seven percent of respondents demonstrated they would be more likely to purchase their lunch from the cafeteria in their workplace if there are healthy options to choose from.

Offering incentives for participating in the wellness program is another recommendation that can be suggested for strong consideration. Forty percent of respondents said they would be more likely to participate if incentives are being offered.

What used to be a cafeteria on one of the floors in the Erie County Rath Building is now currently being used for fitness classes. The study results suggest providing better fitness space for those interested in participating, but have not because they are not given a comfortable environment to exercise in. A helpful suggestion would also be to purchase free weights, yoga mats, treadmills, and televisions for that room. This would be beneficial for employees who cannot make it to classes during specific times. These employees will still have the option to work out on their own when they have some free time during their work hours.

Ideally an employer should be able to mandate exercise, but given labor relation limitations, the county may want to consider providing financial incentives in the next contract. Respondents indicate that employees would respond positively to lower health care premiums. The County could achieve this goal by providing a health care credit to those that participate.

#### **b. Limitations of study**

Limitations of this study consisted of not being able to control who participates in filling out the survey and who does not. Not every survey that was handed out for completion was received back. This affects the accuracy of results because it is based on the opinions of a small random sample of Erie County workers rather than all of them as a whole.

Many departments were not complying with deadlines assigned for the completion of the survey, but since the Wellness Committee needed employee responses, they would extend the deadline for those who needed more time. Even with extending the deadline, surveys were still not successfully turned back in.

A limitation of the research design that may have helped to understand participation rates was the lack of focus groups. Focus groups may have helped to understand participants better

because of how personal this interaction can become. Focus groups would have helped to meet with individuals face to face allowing participants to address questions and concerns on the wellness program.

Another limitation is the fact that there was no testing to see if incentives actually do increase participation in the wellness program. Respondents of the survey did clarify that incentives would encourage them to participate, but this was not tested due to time constraints.

### **c. Future research**

Future research can consist of testing to see if there are more participants after incentives have been offered. Forty percent of respondents stated they would participate in a wellness program if there were incentives offered. The only way to deem that accurate is by checking if the participation rates have increased tremendously.

It would also help to ask participants in future research more background questions. Knowing what their perception of fitness was while growing up might help to understand where the lack of exercise and knowledge is stemming from. Most individuals develop their habits in their homes and this will help understand if the parents' actions or lack of towards being physically fit plays a huge role in their children's lives. This information can help detect where the problem is starting and can encourage exercise awareness in a child's life as soon as they start school. This would mean school curriculums would have to alter slightly to encourage physical fitness activities and teach students on the importance of proper exercise and nutrition.

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## Appendices

## APPENDIX A

### Erie County Wellness Program

The mission of the Erie County Wellness Program is to empower employees to make positive lifestyle choices. This survey will help us better understand your specific needs and concerns, and what we can do to increase participation in program activities. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with us.

1. Do you know that Erie County has a wellness program for its employees that offers free classes and other wellness activities?

Yes       No

2. Although County employees may know that there is a wellness program, many are not aware of some of the specific program offerings. Which of the following Wellness Program activities do you remember hearing about?

**Response Definition: Y= Definitely Yes      N= Definitely No      NS= Not Sure**

	Y	N	NS
Wellness Seminars on nutrition and other topics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fitness classes like Tai Chi, Yoga, and Zumba	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Indoor walking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cooking demonstrations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Which of the following wellness program activities that are currently offered would you be most likely to participate in?

**Response Definition: 5= Very likely 4= Likely 3= Not Sure 2= Unlikely 1= Very Unlikely**

	5	4	3	2	1
Wellness seminars	<input type="radio"/>				
Fitness classes like Tai Chi, Yoga, and Zumba	<input type="radio"/>				
Indoor walking	<input type="radio"/>				
Cooking demonstrations	<input type="radio"/>				

4. Some wellness programs offer perks and prizes for participating. If the Erie County Wellness Program offered incentives, would you be more likely to participate in the program?

Yes     No     Not Sure

5. How likely is it that the following incentives will increase your desire to participate in the Wellness Program?

**Response Definition: 5= Very likely 4= Likely 3= Not Sure 2= Unlikely 1= Very Unlikely**

	5	4	3	2	1
Lower health insurance premiums	<input type="radio"/>				
Free healthy snacks offered throughout the workday	<input type="radio"/>				
Prizes for most improved individuals	<input type="radio"/>				

6. If healthy snacks were offered at the worksite for a low cost, such as low-fat yogurt, granola bars, dried fruit, nut mix, and fresh fruit VERSUS candy, cookies, and cupcakes, how likely are you to purchase the healthier choice?

Very Likely    Likely    Not Sure    Unlikely    Very Unlikely

7. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

**Response Definition SD= Strongly Disagree D= Disagree N= Not Sure A= Agree SA= Strongly Agree**

“Having co-workers offer peer support and encouragement increase the chances of me participating in Wellness Program activities.”

SD    D    N    A    SA

“Having my supervisor and other managers offer support and encouragement increase the chances of me participating in Wellness Program activities”

SD    D    N    A    SA

8. Which of the following do you believe get in the way of more people participating in Wellness Program activities?

**Response Definition: Y= Yes, to a great extent M= Maybe, to some extent N=Not at all NS= Not sure**

	Y	M	N	NS
Classrooms are uncomfortable (size, temperature, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The location of the classes and other activities are not convenient	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It takes too long for employees stationed outside of the Rath Building to get to classes and activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A lack of awareness of Wellness programs activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of funding limits program options	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The attitudes of colleagues discourage participation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There’s just not enough time in the day to fit this in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. If you had access to an on-site cafeteria that offered fresh salads, fruit, wraps, and other healthy lunch options, how likely would you be to dine here?

- Very Likely
- Likely
- Not Sure
- Unlikely
- Very Unlikely

10. Please rate how willing you would be to participate in Wellness program activities based on the following circumstances.

**Response Definition: 5= Very likely 4= Likely 3= Not Sure 2= Unlikely 1= Very Unlikely**

	5	4	3	2	1
Activities that are offered before the workday begins	<input type="radio"/>				
Activities that are offered during the lunch hour	<input type="radio"/>				
Activities that are offered after the work day ends	<input type="radio"/>				

The following questions will help us better understand who is able to participate in the Wellness Program and how we can make it as beneficial as possible for all Erie County employees.

Gender.....	M	F
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Age.....	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Pay Grade		
<input type="radio"/> 5 or less <input type="radio"/> 6-9 <input type="radio"/> 10-12 <input type="radio"/> 13 or higher		

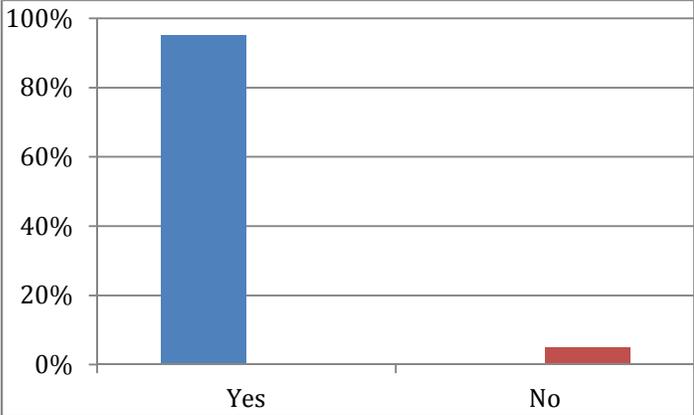
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For internal use only		
Dept.....	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>

# APPENDIX B

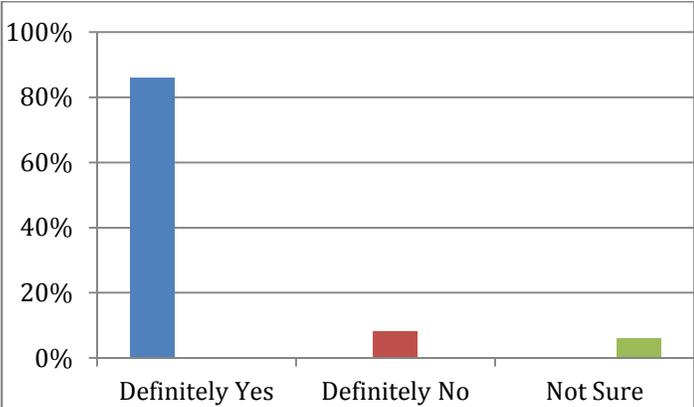
**Total Respondents: 165**

**1. Do you know that Erie County has a Wellness Program for its employees that offers free classes and other wellness activities?**



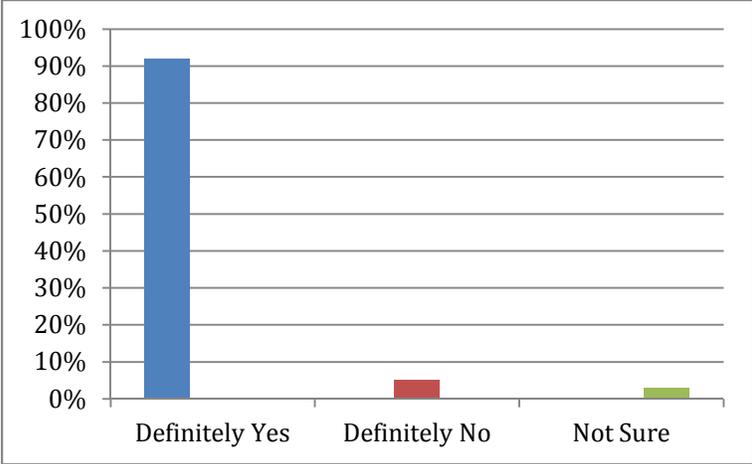
Yes	154	95%
No	8	5%
Total Responses: 162		

**2. Do you remember hearing about Wellness Seminars on nutrition and other topics?**



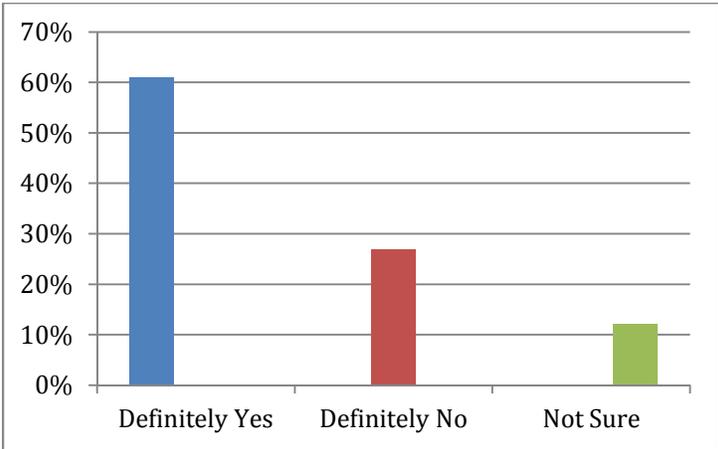
Definitely Yes	141	86%
Definitely No	13	8%
Not Sure	10	6%
Total Responses: 164		

**Do you remember hearing about fitness classes like Tai-chi, Yoga, and Zumba?**



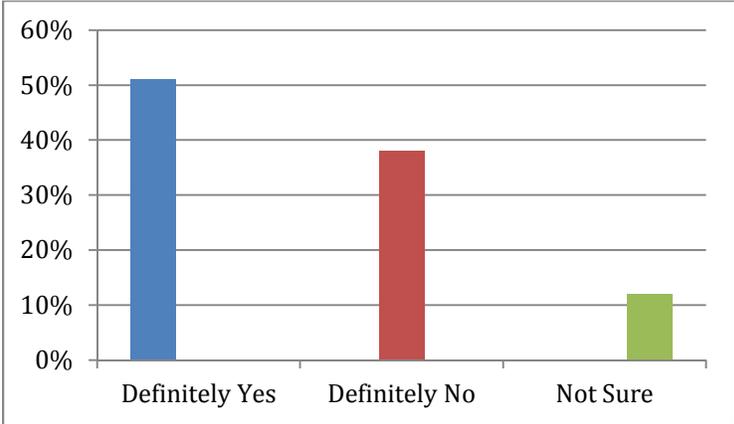
Definitely Yes	151	92%
Definitely No	8	5%
Not Sure	5	3%
Total Responses: 164		

**Do you remember hearing about Indoor Walking?**



Definitely Yes	100	61%
Definitely No	45	27%
Not Sure	19	12%
Total Responses: 164		

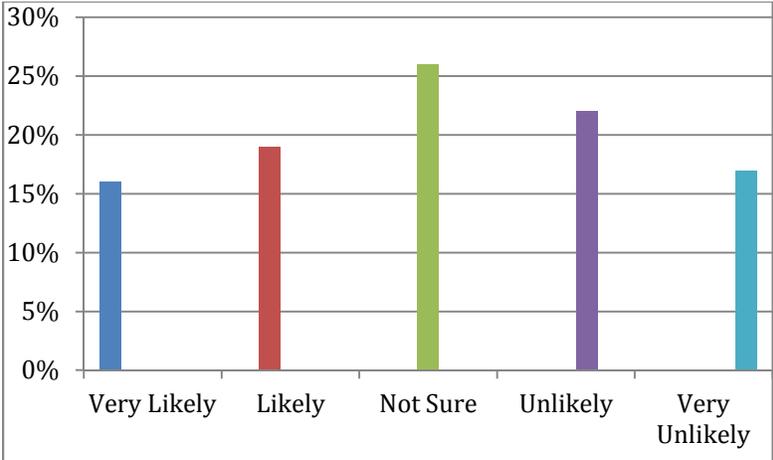
**Do you remember hearing about cooking demonstrations?**



Definitely Yes	83	51%
Definitely No	62	38%
Not Sure	19	12%
Total Responses: 164		

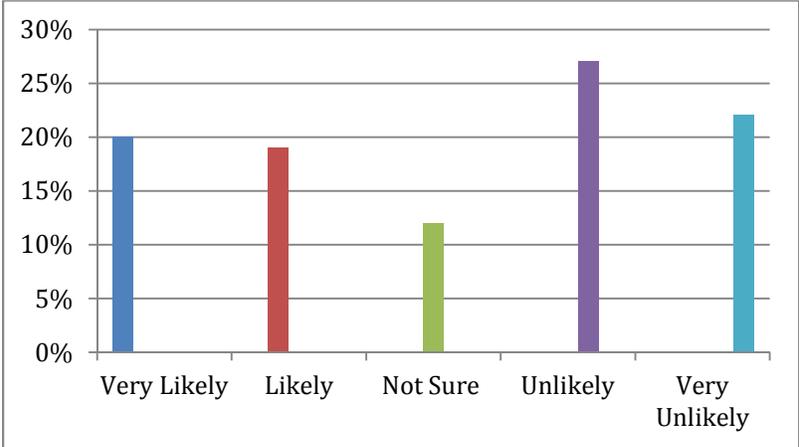
**3. Which of the following wellness program activities that are currently offered would you be most likely to participate in?**

**Wellness Seminars:**



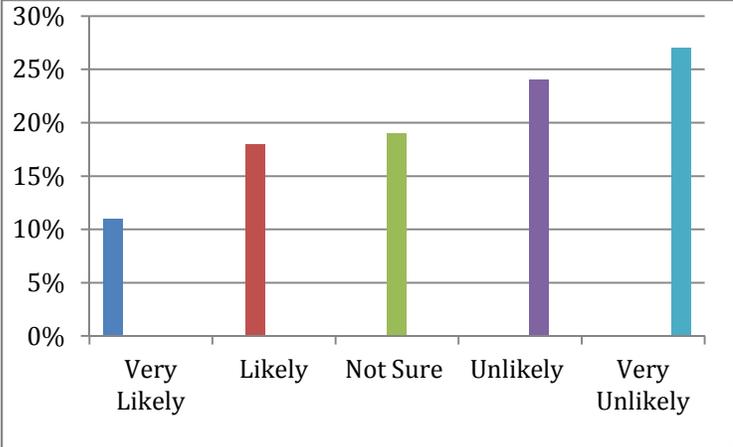
Very Likely	25	16%
Likely	31	19%
Not Sure	42	26%
Unlikely	35	22%
Very Unlikely	27	17%
Total Responses: 160		

**Fitness Classes like Tai-Chi, Yoga, and Zumba**



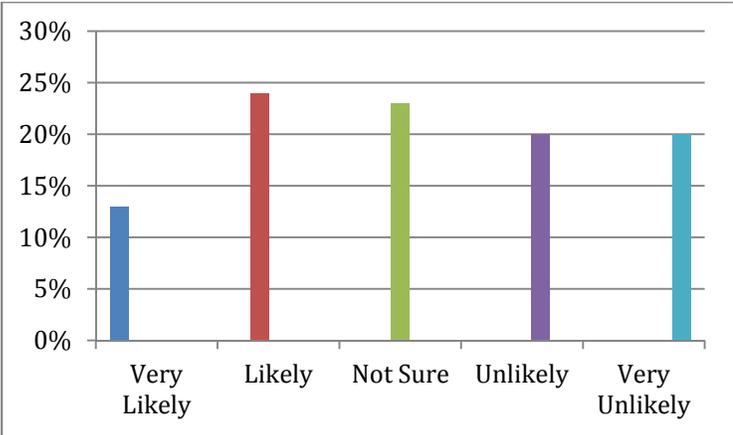
Very Likely	32	20%
Likely	31	19%
Not Sure	19	12%
Unlikely	43	27%
Very Unlikely	36	22%
Total Responses: 161		

**Indoor Walking**



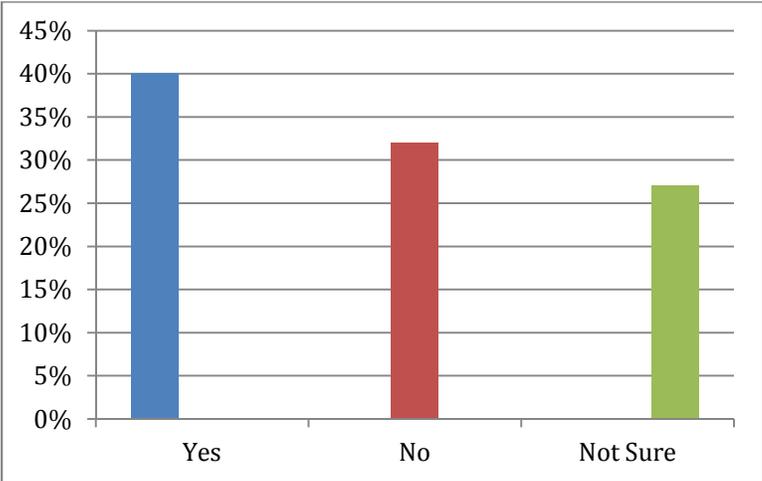
Very Likely	18	11%
Likely	29	18%
Not Sure	31	19%
Unlikely	39	24%
Very Unlikely	43	27%
Total Responses:		160

**Cooking Demonstrations**



Very Likely	21	13%
Likely	38	24%
Not Sure	36	23%
Unlikely	31	20%
Very Unlikely	32	20%

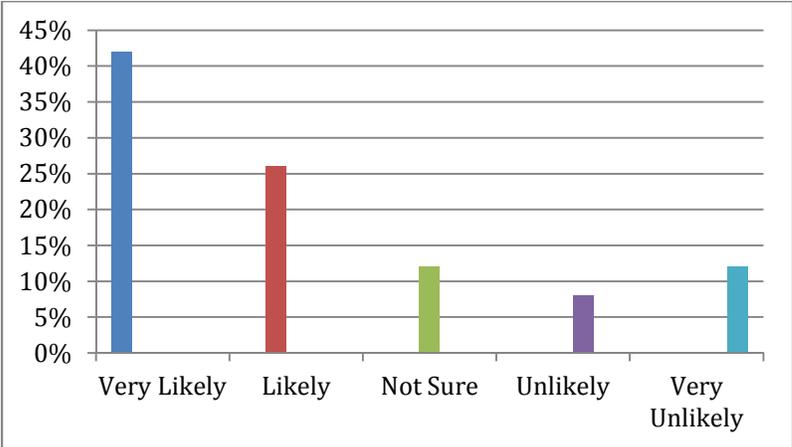
**4. Some wellness programs offer perks and prizes for participating. If the Erie County Wellness Program offered incentives, would you be more likely to participate in the program?**



Yes	65	40%
No	52	32%
Not Sure	44	27%
Total Responses:		161

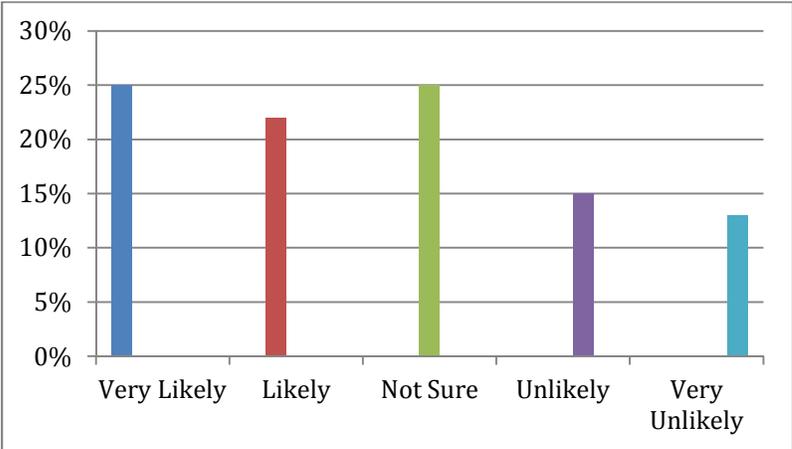
**5. How likely is it that the following incentives will increase your desire to participate in the Wellness Program?**

**Lower health insurance premiums**



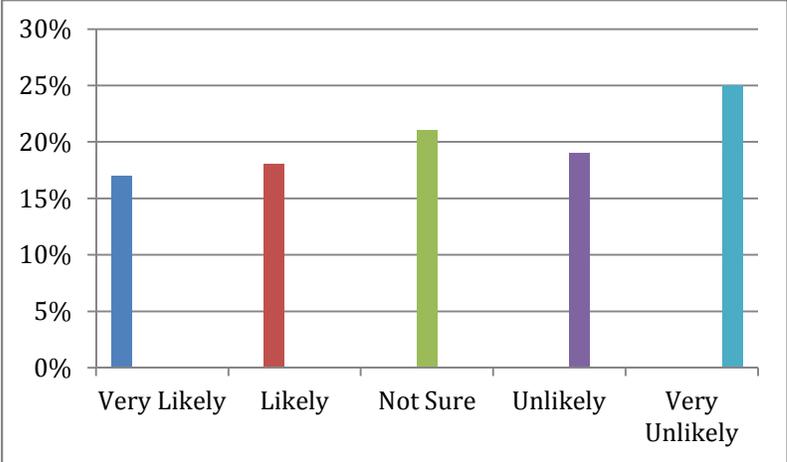
Very Likely	68	42%
Likely	42	26%
Not Sure	20	12%
Unlikely	13	8%
Very Unlikely	20	12%
Total Responses: 163		

**Free healthy snacks offered throughout the work day**



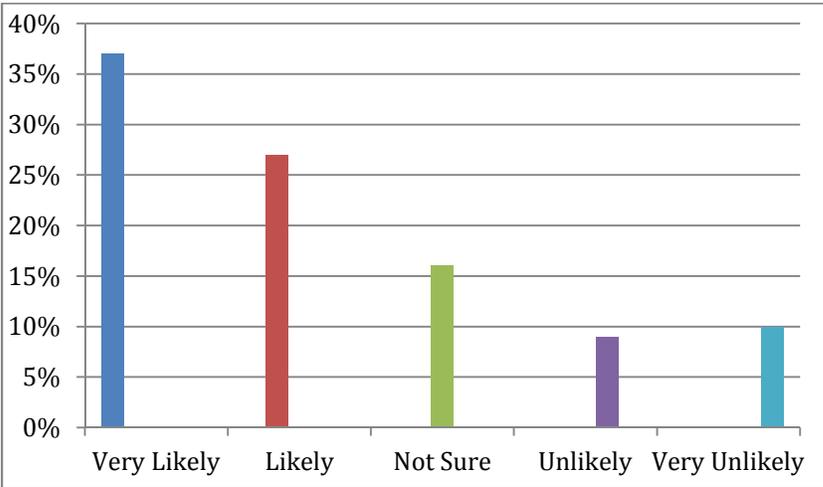
Very Likely	40	25%
Likely	36	22%
Not Sure	40	25%
Unlikely	25	15%
Very Unlikely	21	13%
Total Responses: 162		

**Prizes for most improved individuals**



Very Likely	28	17%
Likely	29	18%
Not Sure	34	21%
Unlikely	31	19%
Very Unlikely	40	25%
Total Responses:		162

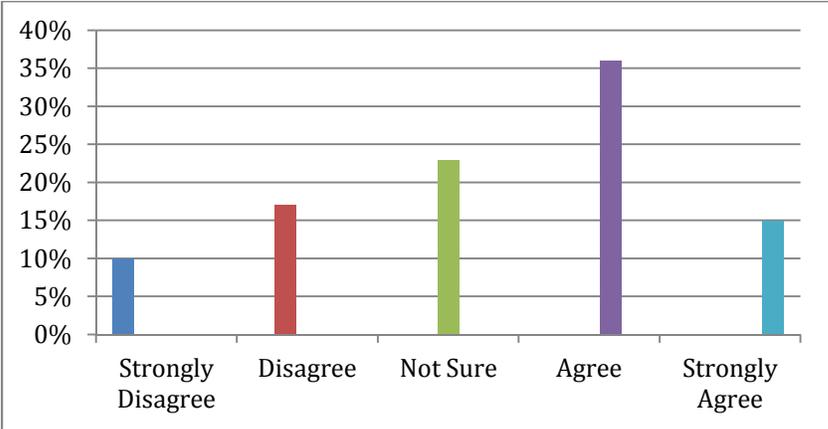
**6. If healthy snacks were offered at the worksite for a low cost, such as low-fat yogurt, granola bars, dried fruit, nut mix, and fresh fruit versus candy, chips, cookies, and cupcakes , how likely are you to purchase the healthier choice?**



Very Likely	61	37%
Likely	45	27%
Not Sure	27	16%
Unlikely	15	9%
Very Unlikely	16	10%
Total Responses:		164

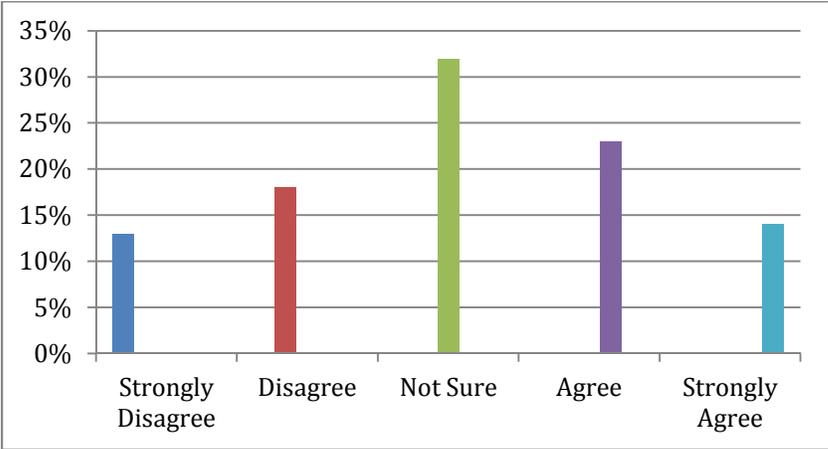
7. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

**“Having co-workers offer peer support and encouragement increase the chances of me participating in Wellness Program activities”**



Strongly Disagree	16	10%
Disagree	28	17%
Not Sure	37	23%
Agree	58	36%
Strongly Agree	24	15%
Total Responses:		163

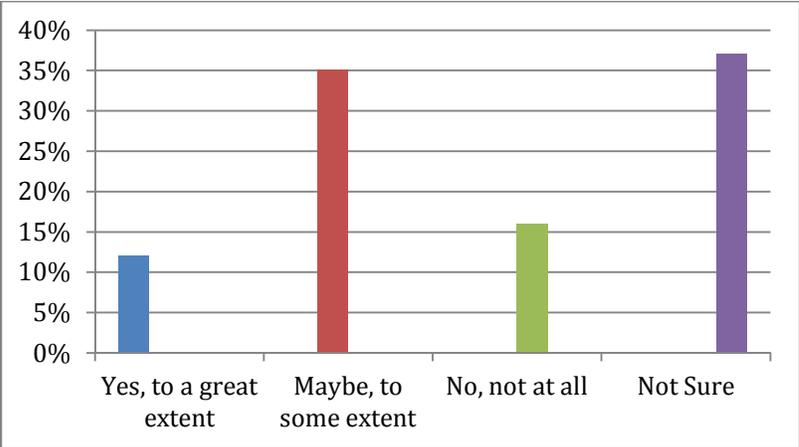
**“Having my supervisor and other managers offer support and encouragement increase the chances of me participating in Wellness Program activities”**



Strongly Disagree	21	13%
Disagree	29	18%
Not Sure	52	32%
Agree	37	23%
Strongly Agree	22	14%
Total Responses:		161

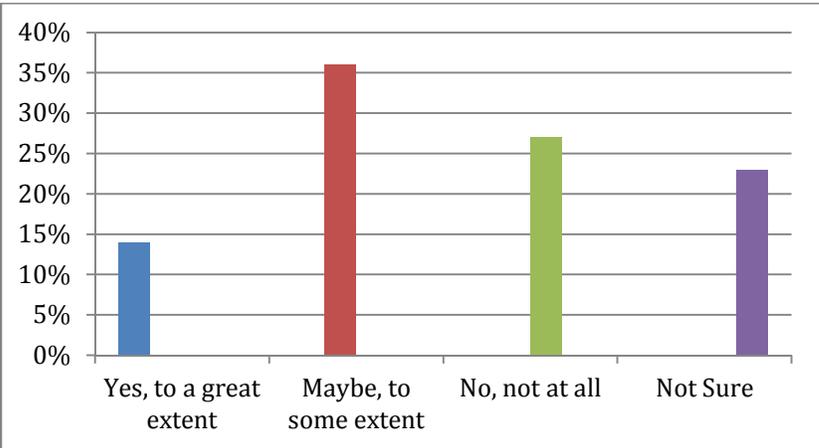
**8. Which of the following do you believe get in the way of more people participating in Wellness Program activities?**

**Classrooms are uncomfortable (size, temperature, etc.)**



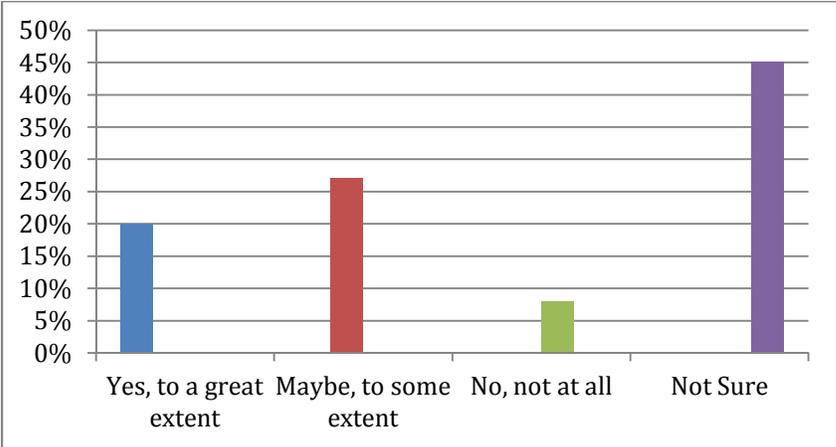
Yes, to a great extent	20	12%
Maybe, to some extent	57	35%
No, not at all	25	16%
Not Sure	59	37%
Total Responses:	161	

**The location of the classes and other activities are not convenient**



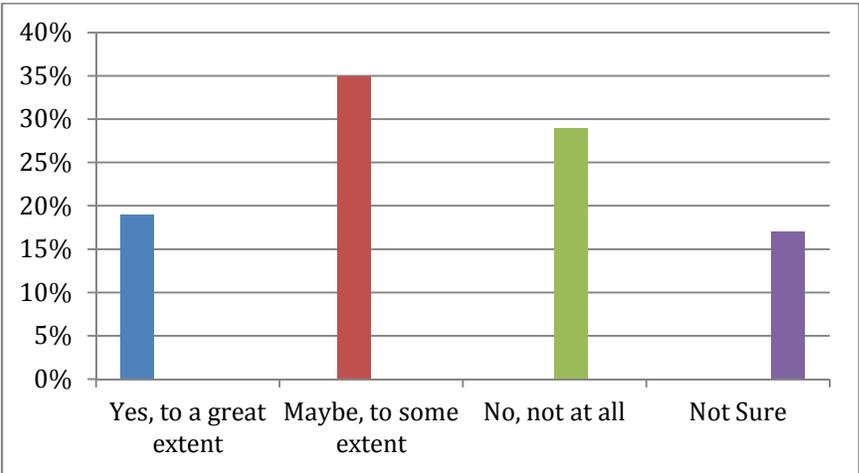
Yes, to a great extent	23	14%
Maybe, to some extent	58	36%
No, not at all	43	27%
Not Sure	38	23%
Total Responses:	162	

**It takes too long for employees stationed outside of the Rath Building to get to classes and activities**



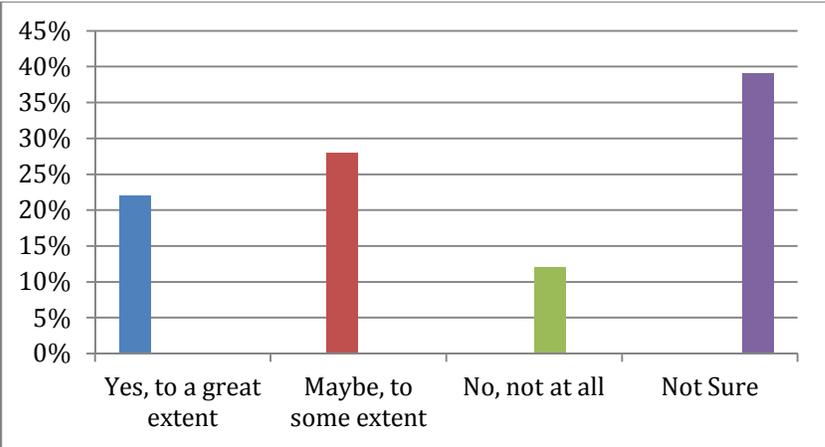
Yes, to a great extent	32	20%
Maybe, to some extent	43	27%
No, not at all	13	8%
Not Sure	73	45%
<b>Total Responses:</b>	<b>161</b>	

**A lack of awareness of Wellness Program activities**



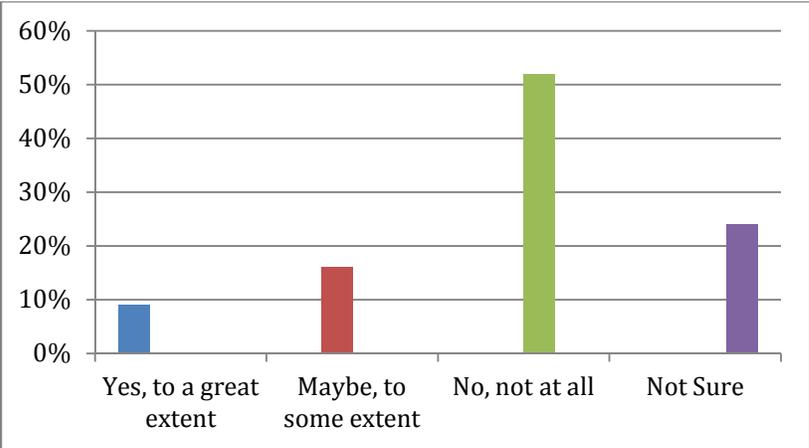
Yes, to a great extent	31	19%
Maybe, to some extent	56	35%
No, not at all	46	29%
Not Sure	28	17%
<b>Total Responses:</b>	<b>161</b>	

**Lack of funding limits program options**



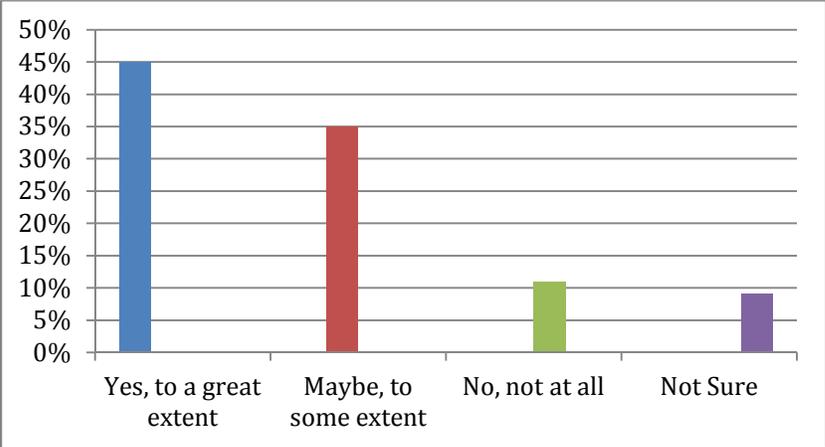
Yes, to a great extent	35	22%
Maybe, to some extent	44	28%
No, not at all	19	12%
Not Sure	62	39%
Total Responses:		160

**The attitudes of colleagues discourage participation**



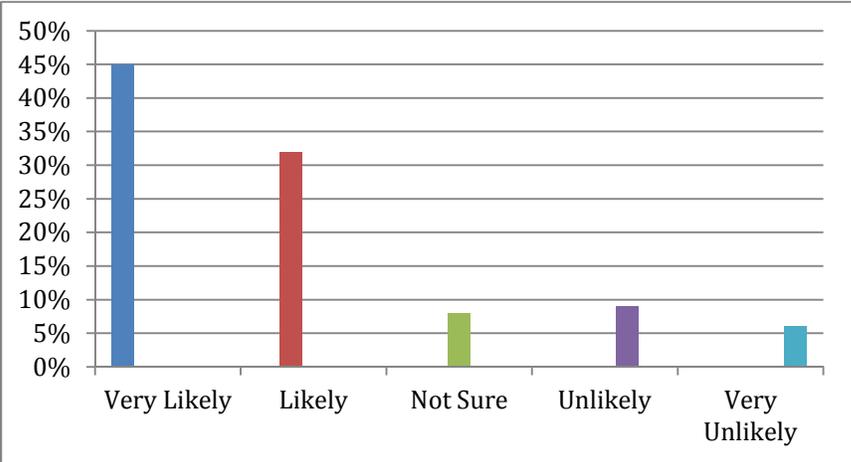
Yes, to a great extent	14	9%
Maybe, to some extent	25	16%
No, not at all	83	52%
Not Sure	39	24%
Total Responses:		161

**There's just not enough time in the day to fit this in**



Yes, to a great extent	73	45%
Maybe, to some extent	56	35%
No, not at all	18	11%
Not Sure	15	9%
Total Responses:		162

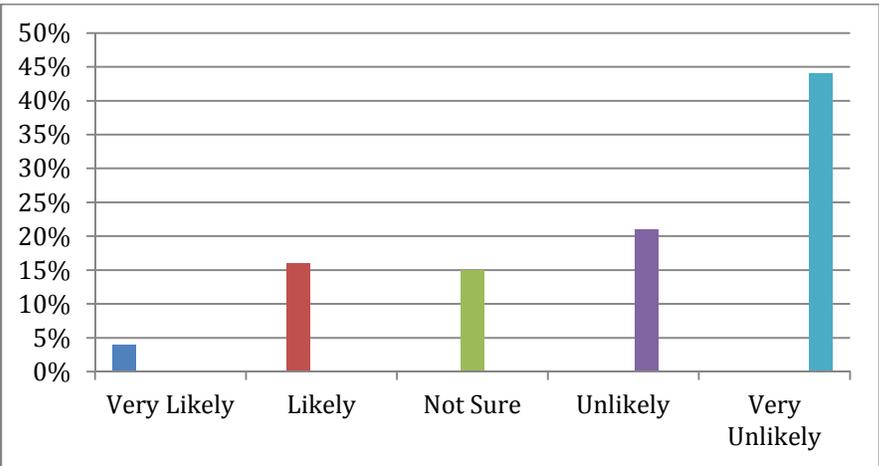
**9. If you had access to an on-site cafeteria that offered fresh salads, fruit, wraps, and other healthy lunch options, how likely would you be to dine there?**



Very Likely	72	45%
Likely	52	32%
Not Sure	13	8%
Unlikely	15	9%
Very Unlikely	9	6%
Total Responses:		161

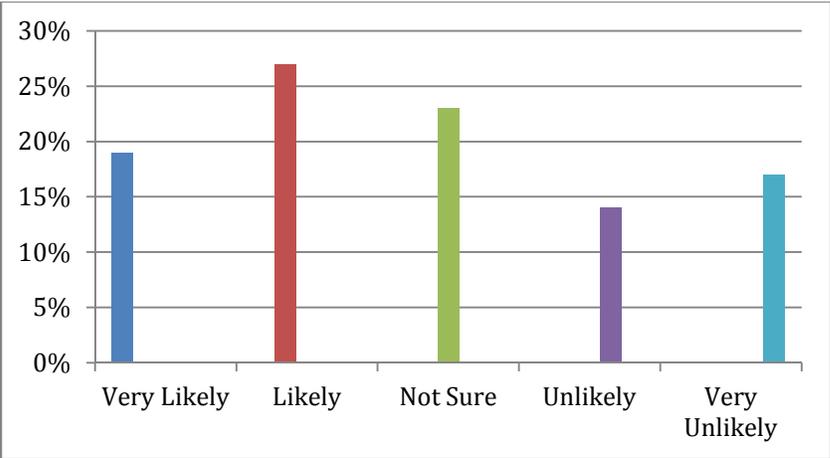
**10. Please rate how willing you would be to participate in Wellness Program activities based on the following circumstances:**

**Activities that are offered before the work day begins**



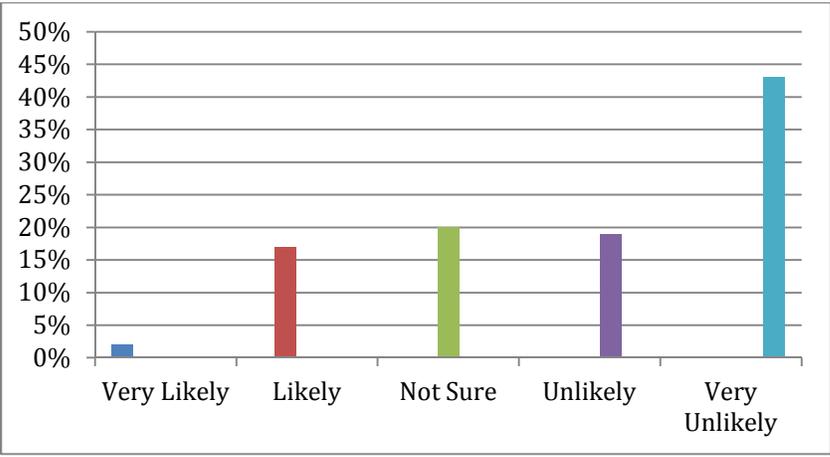
Very Likely	6	4%
Likely	26	16%
Not Sure	25	15%
Unlikely	34	21%
Very Unlikely	71	44%
Total Responses:		162

**Activities that are offered during the lunch hour**



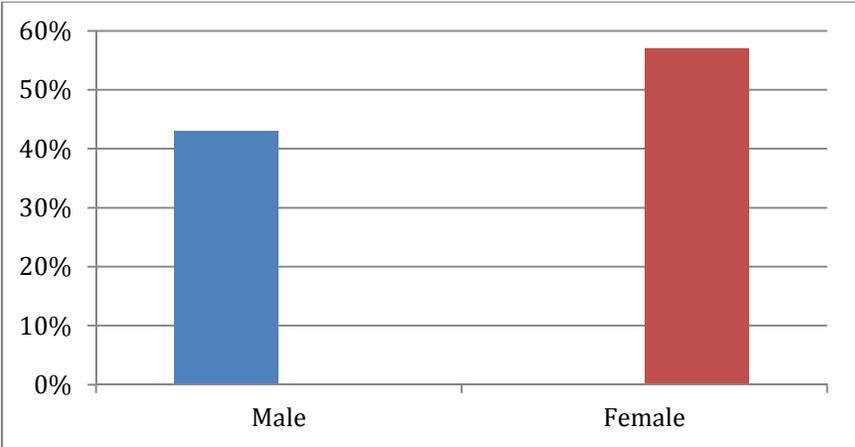
Very Likely	31	19%
Likely	43	27%
Not Sure	38	23%
Unlikely	23	14%
Very Unlikely	27	17%
Total Responses:		162

**Activities that are offered after the work day ends**



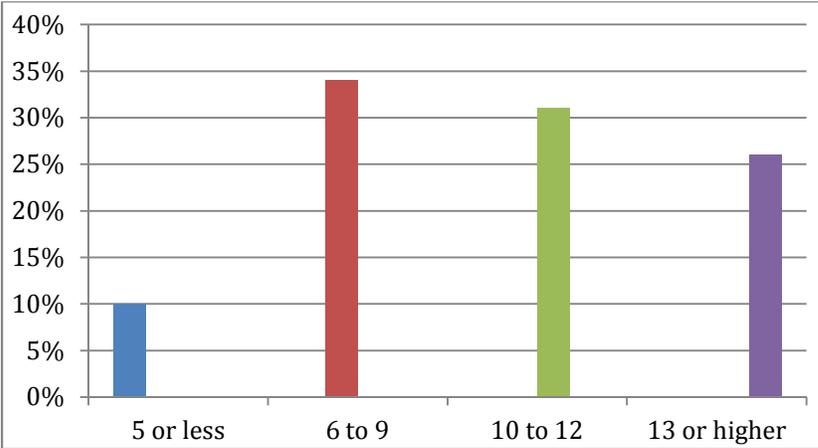
Very Likely	3	2%
Likely	27	17%
Not Sure	32	20%
Unlikely	31	19%
Very Unlikely	69	43%
Total Responses:		162

**Gender**



Male	70	43%
Female	93	57%
Total Responses: 163		

**Pay Grade**



5 or less	15	10%
6 to 9	50	34%
10 to 12	46	31%
13 or higher	38	26%
Total Responses: 149		