



## Washington State ASCD

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### *Why would "healthy" teenagers need an advanced heart screening?*

In the fall of 2019, the Burlington-Edison School District hosted a multi-agency collaboration to facilitate a free teen heart screening for area students. The event, held at Burlington-Edison High School (B-EHS), incorporated volunteers from Skagit and Whatcom counties' emergency services and clinicians with the PeaceHealth Cardiovascular Center in Bellingham. Physicians with the PeaceHealth center regularly coordinate efforts to offer biannual heart screenings at various sites across the region in an effort to reach as many young people as possible to increase early detection for potentially life-saving conditions. The teen heart screening at B-EHS provided an opportunity for students to receive free diagnostic testing and access to cardiology consultation from practicing physicians during the school day. Throughout the event, teens practiced basic CPR skills and learned more about the functions and processes of the heart. The event also provided topical teaching opportunities, with conversations and health-related discussions continuing in classrooms long after the event.



But in addition to valuable training and crucial health screenings, the teen heart event has the added benefit of providing piece of mind. Heart conditions can exist in young people completely undetected. Even teens who seem perfectly healthy may have unknown heart problems. If a defect or abnormality can be identified by clinicians early, it can be treated and monitored throughout the teen's lifetime. Reducing and recognizing factors that could contribute to Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) events could save a life. SCA is usually fatal – a reason schools regularly share information about SCA with student athletes prior to beginning a sports season. But SCA is a concern for all students – athletes and non-athletes alike. Schools and districts have a responsibility to support the health and well-being of all students.

This event in Burlington screened 212 B-EHS students, resulting in 53 referrals for high blood pressure, ten referrals for follow-up visits with a primary care physician for heart-related concerns, and one student referred for a cardiology consultation. All students involved in the screening learned valuable, potentially life-saving information.



Teens are active and may not regularly see a medical provider – certainly not for an undetected heart condition. As a district concerned with the Whole Child, it is important for us to seek opportunities to provide resources to support student health. By increasing students’ awareness of their own health and their knowledge for how they can improve their cardiac functioning – like monitoring high blood pressure and understanding the functions of an electrocardiogram – our hope is that our students will be healthier, happier, and ready to learn and achieve.

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