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By Sarah Plummer
Register-Herald Reporter (<http://www.register-herald.com>)

At Tuesday's Raleigh County Board of Education meeting, the board approved Travelers Insurance as its workers' compensation carrier for the second year in a row.

Travelers agreed to cover the district last year after workers' compensation claims dropped drastically through policy changes and new initiatives like Shoes for Crews and SafeSchools Training.

Darrin Butcher, treasurer and chief school business official, said over the last two years the county has saved \$337,000 in workers' comp claims. He said if factoring in payroll increases, the extrapolated savings would be around \$1.4 million.

"We promised that if the board hired a safety director the position would be self-funding — and it is. We have reinvested those dollars saved into Shoes for Crews, physical capacity tests, drug testing and SafeSchools Training."

Drug testing and physical capacity tests for new hires will begin with the 2012-13 school year.

Butcher said the amount of workers' comp claims was one of his biggest concerns when he was hired.

Jennifer Colvin, safety director, has been working to combat what was the highest cause of claims — slips, trips and falls.

In 2010 there were a total of 35 slips, trips and falls claims (out of 125 total claims), she said. That number decreased to 34 in 2011 and 22 in 2012. The total number of claims also declined to 69 over the two-year period.

In 2010, slip, trips and falls claims cost the board \$372,344, compared to \$87,041 in 2012, she said.

She said her focus has been to identify trends, make and implement a plan to address the trends, and evaluate the plan's effectiveness.

This past school year the district piloted a Shoes for Crews program, asking cafeteria employees, custodians and school bus drivers to wear shoes provided by the board.

By the end of the year, all employees required to wear the new shoes had their shoes and were

wearing them at work, said Colvin.

At the beginning of the year, some shoes were on back order and with Shoes for Crews' 60-day return policy, some employee exchanged styles.

The school board also offered a safety stipend for 1,600 employees to participate in the online safety training program, SafeSchools Training.

Colvin explained that SafeSchools has training options on sexual harassment, bullying prevention, sprains, and falls, and Raleigh County can put its own policies online for employees to read and sign off on.

The training allows for new hires to be trained quickly.

Colvin said nearly 1,500 of the 1,600 employees who were offered the stipend participated in the online training.

Looking ahead for next year, Colvin noted that with trips, slips and falls contained, strains have jumped ahead as the leading source of injury for the district.

Between July 2010 and June 2012, there were 24 strains, 22 slips, 10 struck by accident, three cuts and two bites by students.

Colvin plans to work with housekeeping, the department with the most strains, and examine ways to help prevent this type of injury.

— *E-mail: splummer@register-herald.com*

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