

Introduction

A New Law in Rhode Island

This toolkit was developed to assist local school committees in meeting the mandates of new provisions in Title 16 of Rhode Island General Law (www.rilin.state.ri.us/PublicLaws/law05/law05074.htm or www.rilin.state.ri.us/PublicLaws/laws05/law05076.htm). This measure relating to student and employee health was passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly and signed by Governor Carcieri in June 2005. The law went into effect August 1, 2005. This law:

- Broadens the powers and duties of school committees to include the health and wellness of students and employees;
- Requires that the school committee establish a school health and wellness subcommittee responsible for – but not limited to – the development of policies, strategies and implementation plans that meet the requirements of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. A member of the school committee must chair the committee. Membership must be a majority not employed by the school district, and include at least one parent; and,
- Requires that district strategic plans include strategies to decrease obesity and improve the health and wellness of students and employees through nutrition, physical activity, health education and physical education.

This new law will also help school districts meet a new provision in the Federal **Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, Public Law 108-265** (http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Legislation/Historical/PL_108-265.pdf). Section 204 of this act requires the establishment of a local school wellness policy by the first day of the school year beginning after June 30, 2006 by all local education agencies participating in the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program.

Role of the School District

School districts need to manage a wide variety of education reform efforts. Health is crucial for educational success. Health and education have a circular relationship. We know that children who are healthy are better prepared to learn in school, and children who are prepared tend to perform better and are more likely to graduate. High school graduation is a major predictor of good health outcomes for adults. Increasing high school graduation rates is an official health objective for the nation for the year 2010. Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health, a publication of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, states:

“ In the general population groups that suffer the worst health status also are those that have the highest poverty rates and the least education. Differences in income and education levels are associated with differences in the occurrence of illness

and health, including heart disease, diabetes, obesity, elevated blood lead level and low birth weight.”

There is a wealth of research on the relationship between health and academic achievement. The Resource Section of this Toolkit has links to sources with this information.

Schools play a pivotal role in prevention. Schools, through education, policy and environmental interventions, can help students adopt, practice and maintain healthful lifestyles. Policy may be based in laws or practices. Policy can be used to help institutionalize practices within schools and school districts. Policy at the school level can be formal or informal. For instance some schools in your district may have snack policies that encourage bringing healthy snack choices to school. Some classrooms may have fitness break policies. More formal measures may include adopting a school-based policy for the entire district. It could also mean adding language to existing contracts for school food service providers and community organizations working in schools that encourage sound nutritional practices and opportunities for physical activity as caveats for providing services within the school.

A Coordinated School Health Approach

Coordinated School Health is a public health/education approach for schools that can enhance a school’s role in health promotion and promotes academic achievement. Components of the coordinated approach to school health include:

- health education;
- physical education and activity;
- health services;
- nutrition services;
- guidance, counseling and social services;
- school environment;
- school climate;
- health promotion for school staff; and,
- family and community involvement.

Inviting people in your district that are involved in each of these areas will help to promote a holistic approach to the effort and enhance the group’s work. The District School Improvement Coordinator (DSIC) should also be included to help connect the work of the School Health and Wellness Subcommittee to District strategic plans. Their participation and support will help to institutionalize practices critical to the School Health and Wellness Subcommittee agenda, identify areas of health concerns and help address those issues more effectively.

Making It Work For RI Schools – Toolkit Components

The toolkit is divided into 5 components for easy use and reference.

- 1) The Laws – This section contains information on Federal and State laws guiding this effort.
- 2) The Process – This section contains sample agendas and activities to frame and guide initial meetings.
- 3) Tools – This section provides a School Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey that can be used to conduct an environmental scan of each school building, Model Policy Language on Nutrition and Physical Activity in Schools, Guidelines for Healthy Snacks and Vending, and guidance on purchasing from Rhode Island farmers. Also included is a form to report on your efforts to the RI Departments of Education and Health.
- 4) Data – This section includes health data from the SALT surveys by school for your school district and statewide data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.
- 5) Resources – This section contains information on State and National resources to inform your efforts.

We encourage you to become familiar with the Health and Wellness Toolkit in its entirety. Please use and modify the information as needed. Most importantly these are tools to help you build consensus in your community based on best practices and scientific information. We welcome your suggestions and input on how you have used this tool and ways we can improve it.