



thrive report

Vol. 1, Number 3, March 2007

*A partnership of the RI Departments of Education and Health
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March's Focus: Nutrition

Welcome to the March edition of the **thrive report**. This month we focus on nutrition and its impact on academic achievement. Nutrition, one of the nine integrated components of coordinated school health, continues to play a significant role in maintaining a healthy school environment for students. Healthy eating along with regular physical activity is fundamental to academic success while also reducing childhood obesity, diabetes, heart disease and stroke, cancer, high blood pressure and osteoporosis.

Healthy, well-nourished children are more ready to learn. Studies have shown that a healthy diet can improve problem-solving skills, test scores and school attendance. RI YRBS and SALT data along with the Rhode Island best practices on nutrition and physical activity are useful sources of information for schools and districts to use to implement and maintain healthy school environments. This information and much more can be found on the thrive website, www.thriveri.org.

Recent state laws, establishing District Health and Wellness Subcommittees, as well as laws related to healthier beverages and snacks in schools, are requiring both state and local decision makers to consider the role of nutrition in schools. In communities across Rhode Island, schools are finding creative ways to address the nutritional and physical activity needs of the students they serve. In this **thrive report**, we're happy to share one school's experience with you, and to continue to provide useful tools and resources to support your efforts. As always, we welcome and encourage your feedback about **thrive**, Rhode Island's Coordinated School Health model. Please email us at rosemary.reilly-chammat@health.ri.gov or midge.sabatini@ride.ri.gov. Or call Rosemary Reilly-Chammat at 222-5922 or Midge Sabatini at 222-8952.

Sincerely,

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The Core Issue: The New Nutrition

Nutrition in schools: changing the whole scene

In schools across Rhode Island, there has been a dizzying array of changes regarding food nutrition. In vending machines, school stores and concession stands, high-fat, high-sodium or high-sugar

snacks are giving way to pita chips, multigrain bars, yoghurt and nuts. Soda is being replaced with water and juice spritzers. In the classroom, birthday cupcakes are giving way to fruit platters. Teachers are finding creative new incentives and non-food rewards to offer students instead of candy. In the cafeteria, students are getting to taste farm-fresh fruits and vegetables, salad bars, and healthy international foods. Outside the school building, edible gardens are starting to grow. Bake sales and candy-bar fundraisers are out, while “bakeless bake sales” and physical activity fundraisers are in.

Rhode Island at the forefront of a growing trend

Changes like these did not happen overnight. Kids First and other organizations began promoting changes like these more than a decade ago. The Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition formed in 2002 with a specific emphasis on improving nutrition and physical activity in schools. In 2004, a federal law was passed requiring all school districts to develop a nutrition and physical activity policy and set nutrition standards for all foods sold in schools. The Rhode Island General Assembly went a step further in 2005, requiring that each district set up a subcommittee of the school committee to focus on the health and wellness of students and staff. Those subcommittees are charged with drafting health and wellness policies; making recommendations about nutrition, physical activity, health education and physical education; and helping incorporate health and wellness strategies into district strategic plans. The following year, the General Assembly passed legislation requiring elementary and middle schools to stop serving soda and other less healthy beverages in 2007 and less healthy snacks in 2008. Meanwhile, Rhode Island has launched a unique initiative to create a statewide food service contract - into which districts will be able to opt in the near future - with rigorous nutrition standards for all school meals.

Top down, bottom up

While the state and federal requirements have spurred activity, it is at the local level that things have come to fruition. See for example, this month's *Fresh from the Field* column. District health and wellness subcommittees have brought together people from throughout the school community to tackle sometimes thorny issues. Individuals have not always agreed on the details, but the debates have been healthy. And the results have been even healthier, with changes in school nutrition practices across the state. As the culture changes, more than ever, school environments reinforce the nutrition messages that students learn in the classroom.

Fresh from the Field

Submitted by Steve Stykos, Chair of the Cranston District Health and Wellness Subcommittee

Cranston's efforts to join farm-to-school started more than four years ago with the purchase of apples from Orchard Hills. The project was a collaboration between the Cranston School Food Service, Kids First and my colleagues and me on the Cranston School Committee.

Next in 2003, our coalition met with Confreda Farms to buy corn. We learned that it would have been prohibitive to pay people to husk the corn, so Confreda Farms graciously agreed to allow a team of parent volunteers to husk 1300 ears of corn in their warehouse. The first year we husked only once, but in the second and third years we husked twice, providing fresh vegetables to students for two days in September. Confreda Farms donated the corn that year and in 2004 arrangements were made for Confreda to farm 5 acres in front of Hope Highlands Elementary School in exchange for a regular donation of corn.

This year, Cranston School Food Service added butternut squash and potatoes grown by local farmers to the menu.

These farm-to-school successes are part of a larger agenda which began with the creation of a

Nutrition Committee which was later cited as the model for the state law requiring all districts to form wellness committees.

We see a statewide ban on junk food as just the beginning. Our food service is taking steps to improve the nutritional content of breakfast and lunch by not selling whole milk, substituting other potato items for French fries, offering salad bars and experimenting with other healthier alternatives.

And we're not stopping there. With the introduction of a modest co-ed intramural volleyball program this fall, we hope to rethink physical activity just as we have nutrition.

To share your first-person success stories in "Fresh from the Field," please email annemarie.silvia@ride.ri.gov.

thrive: by the numbers

- **56:** The number of organic farms listed on FarmFresh Rhode Island.
- **4:** The number of in-season vegetables grown in Rhode Island in March -- *brussel sprouts, collard, kale & mushrooms*.
- **63:** The number of fresh and in-season fruits and vegetables grown in Rhode Island in September.

Source: www.farmfresh.org

- **2:** Cups of fruit a 15 year-old-male who exercises lightly should eat daily
- **3:** Cups of vegetables the same teen should eat daily.
- **32:** Number of grapes to make one cup of fruit
- **110:** Number of calories in a cup of grapes
- **12:** Number of baby carrots to make a cup of vegetables.
- **60:** Number of calories in one cup of carrots
- **570:** Number of calories in a large-size McDonald's French Fries

Source: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov

- **10:** Percentage of overweight Rhode Islanders in 1991
- **18:** Percentage of overweight Rhode Islanders in 2003

Source: *Kids First RI*

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The ***thrive report*** can also be found at www.thriveri.org/report.html