

Hello Everyone,



I know many of you have seen episodes of Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution series on television this spring. Coming on the heels of Chef Jamie's well-known work changing school meals in Britain, his arrival here in the U.S. has certainly elevated the volume of discussions surrounding school meals in our America. But how does school food in Rhode Island compare to what the show is portraying in other American school cafeterias? Here are a few facts to help keep it all in perspective.

- 1) **The implementation of statewide Rhode Island Nutritional Requirements (RINR) this school year in ALL Rhode Island schools has set the bar high for healthier school meals in our state.** The criteria associated with RINR exceeds the criteria set at the federal level by the USDA. For example, this means school breakfasts and lunches in Rhode Island contain increased amounts of fruits and veggies (locally grown when feasible). What does increased mean? It means 2 servings of fruits/veggies at breakfast and 3 servings of fruits/veggies at lunch every single day. It means one of these fruit/veggie servings must be dark green or orange (e.g. spinach or squash or peaches) and one must be fresh or raw (not from a can, and not cooked as part of a menu item). More details about RINR and the nutritional criteria behind it can be found on our website. I urge all of you concerned with some of the issues brought up in Chef Jamie's TV series to become familiar with our regulations here in Rhode Island. I think you will be pleasantly surprised by how comprehensive and progressive they are in terms of addressing RI student health.
- 2) **The education, assistance and support for making and keeping school food changes in Rhode Island has never been greater.** The nationwide attention on school meals and student health has many Americans looking at their meal programs, tasting their school cafeteria's food and joining together to help take positive steps towards improving the taste as well as increasing the nutritional value of the meals, snacks and beverages we feed to our children while they are in school. And while all of us at Kids First agree that change and improvement is essential, we also know that lasting change only happens when a community steps forward to embrace and facilitate those changes. We live in a small state. The advantage to that fact is being able to help one another through regional and school district partnerships and connections. If Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution has inspired you to step up and help make school food change happen, there are plenty of paths you can take to get started. First, join your school or district Wellness Committee.

These committees are required by law and are meant to bring interested and devoted people together to work for healthier school environments and policies. A Kids First staff member is a part of every Wellness Committee in Rhode Island and we are more than happy to help direct efforts, explain state laws and assist with positive change. After you join a local Wellness Committee, you might want to also join the statewide organization working towards healthier schools - The RI Healthy Schools Coalition. Through meetings, events and web-based updates, you can learn more about people who are working in organizations statewide to improve RI school health. Don't forget that our RI Farm-to-School program is strong and successful and helps RI kids eat the freshest and healthiest food available. When you are at farm stands, farmer's markets and CSA's this spring season, ask your local farmers about the kinds of produce they sell to your local schools. Ask your local cafeteria staff about helping to increase RI grown in your schools and don't hesitate to contact someone from our Kids First Farm to School team for additional help. More about all of these resources can be found on our Kids First website and if you need individual assistance to get involved in a healthy, Rhode Island school project or organization, contact anyone on our Kids First staff to help you get started.

The Food Revolution has already been underway here in Rhode Island for nearly a decade and although we still have work to do, very positive and encouraging changes are happening now. So let Chef Jamie's efforts in one American town inspire all of us in Rhode Island to keep our little state in the lead advocating and working towards nutritious, great tasting, real foods for our children in all RI schools and child care centers.

Dorothy Brayley

Executive Director, Kids First