



Letter From Dorothy - Summer 2009

RINR will be in effect statewide in fall, schedule a Supt's Workshop for your district

Hello Everyone,

At the end of the school year, the staff and I at Kids First celebrate the many accomplishments and changes that we have seen happen in school districts and communities to improve the health of Rhode Island schoolchildren. As a small state we have our challenges, but one of our greatest advantages is that we are able to share ideas and best practices with one another either through word of mouth, on websites or at events that feature discussions about health and wellness. I'd like to use my summer letter to mention some of this year's highlights and help spread the word about all of our efforts!

This was the year that several districts implemented the Rhode Island Nutritional Requirements (RINR) in their school meals program. RINR, as mandated by RIDE, will be in effect statewide, in all schools, for September 2009. RINR exceeds the nutritional USDA standards and ensures that all Rhode Island schoolchildren are eating healthier foods in their cafeterias. Districts that incorporated RINR this year were able to see firsthand how more fruits and vegetables, more whole grains and less sodium looked on cafeteria trays and plates.

The early incorporation of RINR not only put healthy food criteria into practice but it also gave participating food service directors a chance to increase their local purchases through the Farm to School program. All 36 school districts in the state purchased a Harvest 2008 locally grown food to serve in their cafeteria! Thank you! Farm to School Harvest 2009 has started off strong with several districts serving Rhode Island grown berries and lettuce to students before classes ended. We look forward to hearing about summer meal programs that serve locally grown foods from Rhode Island farms - berries, apricots, broccoli, cucumbers, sweet bell peppers and peaches are just a few of the delicious fruits and vegetables available from participating farms over the summer months. Please contact our Farm to School Specialists to learn more.

RINR inspires schools and food service providers to find creative ways to educate and encourage students and staff about menu changes. This past year many schools organized taste tests, started fruit and veggie bars, held recipe contests, celebrated with harvest celebrations, and practiced healthy eating role modeling. RINR is a progressive and effective way to ensure that school meals continue to improve in Rhode Island, but it's success depends on all of us continuing to be involved in our schools and on our Wellness Committees. Please contact any of us on the Kids First staff if we can help your district with the transition and implementation of RINR this fall.

Kids First workshops and programs were very well attended this year by teachers, administration, school food service staff, parents and students. The Providence school department offered its teachers Professional Development credits for attending a Kids First Wellness Workshop and 360 Providence schoolteachers participated! In addition, 200 teachers and 200 parents from other districts also attended a Wellness Workshop in their community.

Four more districts completed their Superintendent's Wellness Workshop in which principals and leadership administration are provided with information that will help them build healthy communities within their districts and encourage them to act as role models for their staff and students. To date, 30 out of 36 Rhode Island districts have participated in a Superintendent's Workshop - if your leadership team would like to have one, please don't hesitate to contact us.

This past year Kids First presented a brand new workshop called "Re-Thinking Fundraising" that helps schools promote a healthy message during after-school activities and fundraising efforts. In all of our wellness workshops, we offer ideas and suggestions for celebrations in the classroom and healthier snack choices to offer students. We also encourage participants to be hands-on learners so that they may learn how to improve their own personal nutrition habits and increase their physical activity.

Although all of our Kids First workshop presenters - chefs, master gardeners, nutritionists and physical activity professionals - provide a wealth of customized information for your school community, our workshops are only as good as the people who attend them. The effectiveness and success of a educational workshop for your school

district is directly related to active involvement. I'd like to personally thank every individual who is working to improve health and wellness in their school, in their classroom or in their district. Please visit the Wellness Advocates section of our website to hear some of their stories and feel free to contact us if you know an Advocate in your community we should meet.

Here's to an active and healthy summer vacation!

Dorothy Brayley

Executive Director