

Letter From Dorothy - Summer 2010
Top Five School Wellness Trends in Rhode Island Schools

Hello Everyone,



The 2009-2010 School Year has been a fantastic year for nutrition and wellness related improvements in RI schools! Thank you to everyone for their hard work and persistence. We believe that Rhode Island is leading the nation in school nutrition improvements and that is a very good thing for the improved health of our Rhode Island children and school staff members.

I'd like to give a summary of the TOP FIVE health and wellness trends noted this past school year in our own state. Please continue to be active in improving RI student health over the summer months as you find fun ways to get outside, enjoy the warm days and stay fit with your families.

I look forward to hearing more about your efforts in your school districts again next fall.

TOP FIVE School Wellness Trends: 2009-2010 School Year

- 1. Increased student engagement and advocacy** – elementary, middle and high school students in several districts (Barrington, Cranston, Central Falls, North Providence, Providence, Portsmouth, Lincoln) are championing the cause of serving healthier foods in schools and investigating the issues/challenges surrounding the school lunch program. The Lincoln school district reports that a substantial number of senior capstone projects include topics dedicated to personal health. Find inspiring Wellness Advocate stories for the 2009-2010 school year on our Health & Wellness Committee Member section of our website - <http://www.kidsfirstri.org/newhwc.htm> . These stories are great summer reading!
- 2. MORE Chefs in school kitchens** – school food service and communities at large are recognizing the benefits of enlisting the assistance of trained chefs in the school meals programs. ARAMARK has hired a full time chef this year, East Bay Chartwells employs a full-time chef, and Providence Sodexo is about to hire a full time chef. Kids First chefs have worked in/with 26 school districts this school year as part of the Team Nutrition Power Up project (funded by RIDE), helping food service staff prepare meals that not only meet RINR (RI Nutrition Requirements 2009) but also are pleasing to the eye and palate and incorporate fresh Rhode Island grown ingredients!
- 3. Communities participating more in the implementation of their district's food service contract:** Newport parents are setting an example for many communities as they work collaboratively with district administration and

Sodexo to continuously improve the school meals program. Their diverse Nutrition Advisory Committee (formed because it was part of their food service contract) is made up of parents, school committee members, residents, local chefs, and school staff who all care deeply about feeding and educating students about nutritious food as part of the school lunch program. (It takes a village....!)

4. **Increased awareness by many for the need for children to be more physically active during the school day:** We've observed school nurses who have purchased activity break posters with money from their own wallets and parents in several districts (Chariho, Newport, Foster/Glocester, East Greenwich) are asking how much time is allocated for lunch/recess. In other districts, administrators seem informed and ready to support efforts to increase the amount of time that kids get to move in school. Physical Education and Health teachers in many districts are hard at work developing and implementing RI standards based curriculum that supports personal fitness for life.

5. **Greater acceptance that schools are places where "healthy" is the default setting and willingness to accept ideas for healthier celebrations and rewards systems.** Parents don't seem to be fighting as vocally for the cupcakes and teachers don't seem to be fighting new policies that discourage or ban candy rewards in the classroom. Although there still are places where some of these practices continue, more district administrators and school committees are finally backing up the switch to healthier celebrations and rewards with policy change (i.e. Little Compton).

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