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Mission:

We guide communities to improve the nutritional and physical well-being of children.

Goal:

All Rhode Island schools and childcare centers will become places where our children have the opportunity to learn and practice healthy eating and physical activity daily.

Overview:

Since 1998, the Kids First organization has worked at all levels in Rhode Island - state, community, district, school and classroom - to provide support, technical assistance and educational programs that implement community-owned school health and wellness policies and encourage school environments that support wellness. The organization's successful record in collaborating with all school nutrition and physical activity advocates in every Rhode Island community has earned it national attention as both an innovator as well as a motivator for change.

The Kids First focus is to continually provide hands-on education as the foundation for sustained change. To foster wellness-based changes that germinate from newly educated citizenry, the Kids First staff of professional chefs, dietitians, communications specialists, and meeting facilitators provides customized follow-up technical assistance for food systems change, support for the establishment of successful wellness committees and continued education and promotion for building a broad-based ownership of wellness.

By offering these essential elements - **education, technical assistance and support** - to every Rhode Island school and childcare community, Kids First has become a statewide leader in not only advocating, but also providing the "how-tos" for better student and school staff health.

In late 2010, Kids First will launch *Real Food First*, a sister company devoted to improving food and food systems in the workplace. Through *Real Food First*, the Kids First team of nutrition professionals will offer the expertise they have developed over the past decade to businesses, hospitals, organizations and worksite communities in order to benefit health outcomes for all Rhode Island citizens.

Kids First provides:

- **Educational Programs:** Kids First delivers hands-on, behavior-focused education, training and professional development programs on *Nutrition & Food, Physical Activity, Gardening and Food Safety*. Kids First Staff members have delivered over 3,000 educational programs for students, parents, teachers, administrators and food service staff in schools and childcare centers in Rhode Island. The Kids First team of chefs, nutritionists, food safety inspectors, gardeners and physical activity professionals customize each workshop to best address participant needs.
- **Technical Assistance:** Kids First follows up educational programs with tools and customized assistance to help school community members make policy and environmental changes that support healthier eating and increased physical activity. Kids First developed the *RI Nutrition Guidelines for School Vending and a la Carte Foods* and maintains the *RI Approved Product List for Snacks and Beverages*. Kids First facilitates the *RI Farm to School Project*, expanding and encouraging the use of RI grown foods in all school cafeterias. Kids First pioneered and produces the annual *Healthy School Foods Marketplace*, a regional event that connects food service buyers with vendors who distribute healthier and more locally sourced foods. Kids First provides Chef/Nutritionist support for food systems change including food service staff training and supply chain investigation to aid in the procurement of more local and fresh foods.
- **Community Support:** Kids First continuously rallies community support by facilitating communications at the state and local level and by building coalitions that support change through advocacy. Kids First representatives are active members in every Rhode Island school district *Wellness Committee* and can offer resources and contacts to school communities in order to help keep momentum and inspiration for healthy changes alive. Kids First founded the *RI Healthy Schools Coalition*, consisting of 156 members from over 100 organizations involved in improving nutrition and physical activity for RI children. The Healthy Schools Coalition hosts an annual *Breakfast for School Leaders* every Fall at which over 300 school and community leaders come together to share best practices as well as learn about new policy, initiatives and resources available to schools in RI.