

# **Newport Daily** **News**

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## **Town Schools Upgrade Menu**

By Matt Sheley, Daily News staff  
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Like an early Thanksgiving feast, lunch at Forest Avenue School Wednesday consisted of freshly cut turkey, mashed potatoes, squash, an apple and a carton of milk.

Third-grader Benjamin Washington, 8, was among the students who enjoyed the meal, which included produce grown in Rhode Island. The Young Family Farm in Little Compton provided the potatoes and butternut squash, and the Steere Orchard in Greenville provided the apples.

"It's all good," Washington said. "It's yummy, even the squash."

As part of a program sponsored by Chartwells, the school's food provider, and the nonprofit organization Kids First, more than 250 turkey lunches were served at Forest Avenue School Wednesday. East Bay District Manager Barbara A. Cohen said Chartwells started using locally grown foods in 2006 in six of the dozen school districts it services around the state. Based on the success of that effort, local produce such as

potatoes, tomatoes and apples now is the norm in all of Chartwells' schools, she said.

"When it comes down to it, it's the right thing to do," Cohen said. "Besides providing high quality, fresh food for our meals, it helps out the Rhode Island economy as well, so everyone benefits."

Parents and teachers across the country have called for healthier meals in public schools to benefit children and to teach them to turn to more nutritious food options. Principal Steven C. Ponte said Middletown was one of the first school districts in Rhode Island to look into the issue.

As a result of the work of a volunteer Wellness Committee, the days of candy bars, potato chips and soft drinks in local schools are gone, he said.

"No. 1, it's always about the kids and making sure they get the wellness they deserve," Ponte said. "And the sooner we can help them see that they really are what they eat, the healthier they're going to be as they grow older."

Karin Wetherill is a healthy schools coordinator for Kids First, which is based in Providence and dedicated to improving the nutritional and physical well being of students throughout Rhode Island. Locally grown foods are fresher and put less stress on the environment because they don't have to travel as far, and they support local farming and open space, she said.

"I think people's perception of this issue has been changing," Wetherill said. "It

wasn't too long ago that you couldn't turn on the TV or open the newspaper without hearing about the childhood obesity epidemic. Now, people are more conscious of the food they're eating and their children are eating, and that's a good shift in social awareness."

Parents on-hand for the lunch said they appreciated the efforts school officials, Chartwells and Kids First have undertaken to put fresher, healthier foods in their children's menus.

"The more local foods in their meals, the better," said Mitch Turner, whose children, Kieran and Skylar, attend the school. "It's a good example for them."

Charles "Todd" Silvia also has two children attending Forest Avenue School. Daughter Emily is in third grade, and son Connor is in first grade.

"I think it's great," the elder Silvia said of the new menu. "They should be going local as much as they can."

Tim and Amanda Feaster said they were impressed with the quality of the meal after eating with their 6-year-old son Christian.

"We're pretty picky about what our kids eat and it's good to know they are too," Amanda Feaster said.

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