

Healthy Vending in Rhode Island Public School Districts

Initiative Description

Since 2001, RIDE has supported the development and promotion of policies to enhance the school nutrition environment in its 36 districts. Districts were encouraged to

- Create and implement comprehensive wellness policies that included components to increase the nutritional value of foods and beverages in vending machines and a la carte food offerings.
- Promote nutritious choices in other areas of the school nutrition environment.

RIDE's nutrition project preceded the federal wellness policy mandates.

Evaluation

In 2005, the evaluation assessed progress in implementing policies or directives to enhance the school nutrition environment in Rhode Island school districts. The assessment included

- Interviews of 72 district administrators from 31 school districts.
- Case studies of 6 selected districts based on their progress in implementing nutritional policies.
- Five middle schools and 6 high schools as case studies on the implementation of nutritional policies.

Findings

Evaluation results revealed

- Schools with approved nutrition policies in place had more healthy snack items available for sale a la carte and in vending machines than those without such policies.
- Although all schools were engaged in the process of making changes, an abundance of less healthy food options were still available to students from multiple sources throughout the day.
- The process of developing and implementing wellness policies required active cooperation between the district-level school committee or school board, and district- and school-level administrators. A positive and dynamic partnership among the schools, the district, and the food service providers enhanced understanding of the best approach to putting written policies into practice.
- School-level involvement of students, parents, and teachers, early in the policy development process, increased awareness and acceptance of policies.

Implications

All school districts in the United States are now mandated to develop and implement local wellness policies. The Rhode Island experience provides particularly timely lessons for other schools and school districts.

The Public Health Problem

There are high levels of obesity and poor nutrition habits among many students in the state of Rhode Island. In response to this issue, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) promoted healthier nutritional environments in all 36 of its districts. This project was

- Part of Rhode Island's coordinated school health program.
- A partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Health and Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition.



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
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