

Rhode Island

Helping Rhode Island Students Thrive: Moving from State Law to Local Action

Problem Overview

In Rhode Island, from 2001 to 2005 the percentage of overweight high school students increased from 9% to 13%. In 2005, among the state's high school students,

- 68% did not meet currently recommended levels of physical activity.
- 75% reported eating less than five servings of fruits and vegetables daily.
- 80% did not attend physical education class daily.

That same year, the state passed legislation requiring all school districts to establish a school health and wellness subcommittee to develop policies, strategies, and implementation plans to meet the requirements of the federal Child Nutrition and Women, Infants, and Children Reauthorization Act of 2004. In addition, the law required that all district strategic plans include ways to decrease obesity and improve the health and wellness of students and employees.

Program/Activity Description

Rhode Island's *thrive* program—supported in part through CDC funding for the state's Department of Education's Coordinated School Health Program and in partnership with the state's Department of Health—has helped school districts implement the new law and establish district-level health and wellness subcommittees. The *thrive* program has developed a toolkit containing guidance, model policies, data, and other resources to help schools implement the mandate. The program also has recruited parents, registered dietitians, and other health professionals to work on health and wellness subcommittees and provide their expertise. Local successes include

- Cranston Public Schools' "Farm to Schools" program, which features a partnership with a local orchard owner, a community farmer, and parent volunteers, who periodically supplement the fresh fruits and vegetables provided in the district's lunch options.
- Westerly Middle School, which now requires either water or drinks containing at least 50% fruit juice to be sold in school vending machines.

Program/Activity Outcome

Building on the increased awareness about school health and wellness issues, state legislators passed additional laws in 2006 and 2007 requiring all schools to offer only healthier beverages and snacks. State legislation supporting school health and wellness activities helps combat the epidemic of obesity, and adds strategic institutional support to enhance long-term, sustainable efforts to build stronger minds, stronger bodies, and stronger schools.

