

## ***ROCK ON CAFÉ PROVIDES HEALTHIER SCHOOL MENU CHOICES***

*Students test menu items for acceptability and nurses answer questions from parents*

### **Public Health Problem**

- Rates of overweight and obesity among New York children are rising.
- About one fourth of overweight children already have at least one risk factor for heart disease such as high blood pressure or high blood cholesterol.
- Eating healthier can help reduce children's risk factors but the choices offered at school may not support their efforts to eat a better diet.

### **Program**

- The New York State Department of Health, Healthy Heart Program, funds the Health Education Awareness Resource Team, which formed a coalition of food service directors from twelve school districts to develop healthy-choices menus for kindergarten through fifth grade students in thirty-nine district elementary schools in Broome and Tioga Counties.
- These menus, identified by a "Rock on Café" logo for increased recognition, provide healthier choices while supporting tastiness, quality, and good nutrition.
- Components of the Rock on Café promotion include student-testing of all recipes or products before they are introduced in the cafeteria, newspaper ads, local magazine articles, stickers with the Rock on Café logo for packaged foods, and a student reading of the day's menu on local television.
- To help parents understand the changes in school menus United Health Services provides access to Nurse Direct at the Stay Healthy Center, a nurse-staffed service which has information about the school cafeteria changes and can add families to their Stay Healthy Kids program.

### **Impact**

- Healthier food options are reaching 15,000 students including salads, low-fat American cheese, whole grain breads and rolls, and "French fry" products that are baked and trans fat-free. New recipes and products are introduced gradually and have been well received.
- Using a consistent menu across district schools saves money by allowing schools to benefit from volume discounts on foods they buy.
- Schools experienced a three percent increase in sales, contributing to an improved financial picture for their food service operation.
- A computer-assisted Stay Healthy Kids program was developed and is available to parents.
- High schools are a planned addition to the healthier menu program.

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