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healthi kids coalition's web site puts policy advocacy at people's fingertips

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healthikids.org enabled residents to lobby Rochester City School Board of Education members for new school food-service contract

A new Web site launched by the Healthi Kids Coalition enables people to advocate for improving school food and for helping children become more physically active.

The site (www.healthikids.org) allows the community to advocate for the coalition's policy agenda, which includes more nutritious food in schools and safer, more accessible play areas for children. With the click of a mouse, people can send letters to elected officials and share their opinions about health-policy initiatives and legislation. The healthikids.org site also features issue surveys, healthy food information, an events calendar, and a public forum for sharing experiences and ideas with other advocates.

City residents recently used the site to lobby Rochester City School Board members, urging them to select ARAMARK as the district's 2009-2010 food-service vendor. Residents simply selected a pre-written letter or customized their own, and then sent e-mail messages to all board members at once. ARAMARK had been recommended by the Healthi Kids Coalition because it best met 13 stringent nutritional guidelines set forth by the coalition. The ARAMARK contract was approved by the Board of Education at its July 28 meeting, by a vote of 6 to 1.

"Healthi Kids is a rapidly growing grassroots movement in the Rochester area," said Wade S. Norwood, FLHSA's director of community engagement. "With this Web site, the power of community health advocacy is now at people's fingertips. We encourage everyone who cares about children's health to visit the site and to join our campaign."

Healthi Kids is an initiative of Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency, with the support of the University of Rochester Medical Center's Center for Community Health and Department of Pediatrics, and The Children's Agenda. The effort is funded by the Greater Rochester Health Foundation as part of its childhood obesity and overweight prevention strategy.

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