Holyoke Kindergartners Eat a Healthy Breakfast with State Representative Aaron Vega

Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council Nutrition Program, sponsored by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, celebrates end of successful school year with nutritious breakfast and award event

Holyoke, MA — July 8, 2013 — Ten public school kindergarten classrooms in Holyoke celebrate the success of a year-long pilot nutrition education program — *The Holyoke Kindergarten Initiative* — with a healthy breakfast event and Draw-a-Farm Contest award ceremony.

The Holyoke Kindergarten Initiative, jointly coordinated by the Holyoke Public Schools and the Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council, an early childhood and family nutrition education program that uses local food and farming to teach the fundamentals of a healthy, local diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables. It includes lots of fresh produce snacks throughout the school year, take-home produce and recipes for families, field trips to local farms, and a new curriculum to support the lessons of healthy eating and local agriculture. Significant funding for the program was provided by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts through its 75th Anniversary Grant Program, which provided a onetime $75,000 grant to four Massachusetts not-for-profits to address nutrition with young children.

The Holyoke Kindergarten Initiative's end of the school year child/parent oatmeal breakfast event took place in ten Holyoke kindergarten classrooms. Professional Chef Ana Jaramillo of the Holyoke Health Center prepared the food and encouraged adults to allow their six-year-olds to select and serve their own oatmeal toppings. Some students focused exclusively on mixing in fresh strawberries, while other kindergarteners piled on the flavor and added dried cranberries, apricots, and other delicious ingredients to their breakfasts.

In addition to the breakfast events, several classrooms took part in the first annual Kindergarten Draw-a-Farm Contest. At the Marcella Kelly Elementary School, State Representative Aaron Vega presented awards to the winners. Victor Algarin (pictured above) proudly accepted a Community Serviced Agriculture (CSA) half-share from Holyoke's Nuestras Raices farm for his winning artwork. All summer and until frost, Victor's family will enjoy a weekly bagful of delicious and healthful Holyoke-grown produce. The second-place winner's family was awarded a $50 gift certificate to the Nuestras Raices farm store.

About the Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council (HFFPC)
The Holyoke Food Policy Council was started in 1995 to address issues of food access in Holyoke. HFFPC is dedicated to bringing together community partners to realize its vision of comprehensive, community-driven change that enhances opportunities for children and their families to access healthy foods and physical activity. Its mission is to create and sustain a more healthy and vibrant Holyoke through the development of programs, policies, community leadership and advocacy.

About the Holyoke Public Schools
The philosophy of the Holyoke Public Schools is to provide the best possible education for all students within the limits of the resources available to the community in order to develop well-rounded individuals who are prepared to function effectively in an evolving international society. Its vision is that every student will graduate from high school ready for college success without remediation and for success as a worker and citizen in a global society. The mission is to provide educational opportunities for all students to reach their potential in a safe, secure, healthy learning environment while valuing diversity and promoting responsible citizenship.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (http://www.bluecrossma.com) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We are committed to working with others in a spirit of shared responsibility to make quality health care affordable. Consistent with our corporate promise to always put our 2.8 million members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality. BCBSMA also has a strong commitment to the community. In 2012 alone, more than 3,000 of our associates contributed more than 26,600 volunteer service hours to nonprofit organizations across the Commonwealth, the company contributed more than $1.6 billion to the Massachusetts economy and gave nearly $6.3 million in philanthropic contributions to 560 nonprofit organizations. To learn more about BCBSMA’s Corporate Citizenship efforts, visit BlueCrew @ Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts on Facebook or our annual Corporate Citizenship Report.

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