

For Immediate Release

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NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund Reports 25,000 Teachers Trained to Combat Childhood Obesity in the Classroom

RALEIGH, NC —The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund has trained 25,000 kindergarten through eighth grade public school teachers across North Carolina on how to provide healthier, more active classrooms through its Fit Kids initiative, launched last year. School administrators now require 30 minutes of physical activity in the classroom setting each day, in order to comply with a recent policy adopted by the State Board of Education.

The Fit Kids program is part of the largest single-subject teacher training initiative in the history of North Carolina public education. It is a statewide initiative funded by the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) and implemented by Be Active North Carolina. Under this program, more than 350 NC ‘master trainers’ will coach at least 50,000 public school teachers on practical ways to create active and healthy classroom environments. Fit Kids also provides teachers an opportunity to receive continuing education units to support their state-required teaching accreditation.

HWTF reported that 43 school districts across the state have met the “Fit Kids” training goal, i.e. 70% of the teachers in the district had received the training. Each school district meeting the goal receives a certificate and a \$1,000 stipend for its school-based wellness efforts .

“Childhood obesity is a real challenge for North Carolina and there are real consequences for the future of our kids,” said HWTF Chair Lt. Governor Bev Perdue. “Getting children active during the school day will not only make our kids healthier today, but it can provide long-term benefits both physically and academically.”

Recent research shows that students who engage in daily physical activity exhibit superior academic performance, have better attendance, and an increased positive attitude toward school.

“The energizers have been positive in terms of student’s health and academics,” said Principal Pat Mitze of Vienna Elementary School in Forsyth County School District. “Allowing students to expend physical energy has been very positive both physically and academically.”

As part of the training, all teachers receive a classroom Energizer Booklet, which contains active lesson plans. Teachers also receive an orientation on HWTF’s Fit Kids website (www.FitKidsNC.com), a user-friendly, interactive Web site that is designed to assist teachers and administrators in meeting the new physical activity mandate through curriculum-supported classroom activities, as well as to provide resources and tips for Physical Education, recess and intramurals.

The historic effort comes against the backdrop of mounting studies showing that North Carolina’s young people are dangerously overweight. A report recently released from the Washington-based Trust for America’s Health indicates that North Carolina’s children are the fifth most obese in the United States.

In response to rising obesity rates, the NC State Board of Education revised its Healthy Active Children (HAC) policy, requiring each of the state’s systems to adopt a formal wellness program and to put it into action by the 2006-2007 school year. The HAC policy also requires North Carolina schools to provide at least 30 minutes of *daily* physical activity for all K-8 children.

For more information about the Fit Kids initiative, please visit the website www.FitKidsNC.com. To schedule a training, please contact Be Active at 919-287- 7000.

About the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund:

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina’s share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$143 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.