

GROWING MINDS, HEALTHY BODIES

A Collaboration led by Children First of Buncombe County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Asheville Childhood Obesity Expanding Reach After Successful Pilot

*Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue celebrates success
by joining in distribution of fresh produce to kids*

ASHEVILLE, NC – Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, chair of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF), celebrated the success of the *Growing Minds, Healthy Bodies* partnership, which gives weekly allotments of fresh produce for kids to take home, to encourage a comprehensive family approach to better health.

“It’s important to North Carolina that we reinforce good eating habits,” said Lt. Gov. Perdue, “With the rising rates in childhood obesity and the incidences of diabetes in children, young people are on the frontlines in making sure that their parents also support healthy lifestyles.”

Last year, a pilot program involving two local-area schools implemented a fresh produce distribution program. Based on this success, *Growing Minds, Healthy Bodies* has expanded the Backpack Program to eight schools and community centers, reaching more than 325 kids. The program is designed to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables and extend awareness about the importance of healthy eating directly to families. Today, Lt. Gov. Perdue gave 40 Oakley Elementary School students backpacks full of fresh produce and recipes to take home.

As programs like *Growing Minds, Healthy Bodies* continue their work in the community, the N.C. State Board of Education and legislators are making a concerted effort to improve the health of North Carolina children.

In April of this year, the N.C. State Board of Education unanimously voted to mandate that schools be required to provide at least 30 minutes of physical activity per day for all students in attendance that day for Kindergarten through 8th grade. This mandate was based on the recommendations of HWTF’s Study Committee on Childhood Obesity, *Fit Families NC*. Dr. Olson Huff, a retired Asheville pediatrician and HWTF commissioner, is co-chair of the committee. The new policy will be in place beginning with the 2006-07 school year.

In July of this year, the General Assembly approved a bill that set limits on beverages and snacks sold in school vending machines. The bill restricts the amount of sugar-sweetened soft drinks that schools can sell in vending machines and requires that at least 75 percent of each snack machine’s offerings must be stocked with low-calorie foods. This new law is also based upon recommendations based on HWTF’s childhood obesity study committee.

Growing Minds, Healthy Bodies is part of the *Fit Together* obesity-prevention initiative, funded by the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina. The partnership includes Children First of Buncombe County, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, and MANNA FoodBank.

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