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PENNSYLVANIA EARNS TOP GRADE IN EFFORTS TO CURB CHILDHOOD OBESITY, GOVERNOR RENDELL SAYS

*PENNSYLVANIA RECEIVES AN 'A' IN 2006
UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE OBESITY REPORT CARD*

HARRISBURG – Governor Edward G. Rendell today said Pennsylvania’s initiatives to curb childhood obesity have scored an “A” in the 2006 University of Baltimore Obesity Report Card, which praised the state for its legislative and public policy work to control childhood obesity.

“Childhood obesity is a health problem that can be prevented and treated,” Governor Rendell said. “Through our work with schools, families and health care providers we are making progress to ensure that every child in Pennsylvania is better able to lead a healthy lifestyle.”

Each year, the University of Baltimore Obesity Initiative grades states on their efforts to pass obesity-reducing legislation. This year, Pennsylvania was one of five states to receive an “A” for its efforts to control childhood obesity.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity in the U.S. has steadily increased over the last 20 years, and has doubled in children. It is the second leading cause of death behind tobacco. And, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 9 million children, or 16 percent, are overweight. The rate of overweight children in Pennsylvania is 18 percent.

Governor Rendell said Pennsylvania is doing many things to help children not become overweight.

“For example, we are tracking school children’s height and weight through our growth screening program so we can detect unhealthy developments sooner and provide information to help families treat the problem,” the Governor said. “Pennsylvania is also supporting the location of supermarkets and fresh food retailers in our urban and rural communities. And, the commonwealth’s Safe Routes to School and Hometown Streets programs improve the walking routes to and from local schools and offer a built-in physical fitness routine for our kids.”

Below are some of the Pennsylvania initiatives to fight childhood obesity:

- Pennsylvania Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan to Prevent Obesity and Related Chronic

Diseases – A state plan designed to systematically target policy and environmental changes in schools, communities, and healthcare to promote a Pennsylvania that supports and values healthy lifestyle behaviors.

- Growth Screening Program – Requires schools to calculate and record students' body mass index (BMI) and BMI-for-age percentile when the students' height and weight are measured.
- Keystone Kids Go! – This new initiative in Pennsylvania focuses on improving children's nutrition and physical activity. Keystone Kids Go! targets early childhood practitioners working in childcare, Head Start, early intervention, family literacy and pre-kindergarten programs.
- Keystone Healthy Zone – This annual program recognizes and rewards schools for making a commitment to improve nutrition and physical activity. Keystone Healthy Zone provides resources, templates, training, technical assistance and mini-grant funding for schools to make healthy changes and meet the federal requirements for school wellness policies.
- Governor's Fitness Challenge-Keystones to a Healthy PA – The Governor's Fitness Challenge is a school-based competition for children in grades K-8 to increase physical activity during and/or after school. The top three schools will receive a \$5,000 grant to purchase equipment to further promote physical activity or nutrition.
- Balance Media Campaign – The Balance Media Campaign is a social marketing effort designed to complement community-level nutrition and physical activity programming by teaching children aged 6-11 years about the importance of energy balance. The campaign's slogan, "Energy In. Energy Out." emphasizes the need to balance the energy we eat with the energy we expend through physical activity.

Last September, Pennsylvania released its first-ever childhood obesity compendium, "PA Healthy Kids: Pennsylvania's Strategy for Balancing Nutrition and Exercise in Kids." Produced by Governor Rendell's Cabinet on Children and Families, the Healthy Kids compendium outlines various programs, services and initiatives offered by the state to increase physical activity and improve the nutritional choices of Pennsylvania's youth. It also includes success stories highlighting the positive impact of various programs and lists a number of resources that are available to help families, schools, communities, and organizations develop their own programs that promote healthy living.

To view the 2006 University of Baltimore Obesity Report Card, visit <http://www.ubalt.edu/experts/obesity/index.html>. For more information on obesity prevention, visit www.health.state.pa.us.

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