

## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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### **CHILDHOOD OBESITY AWARENESS MONTH RECOGNIZED IN ARKANSAS Activities focus on action to address the epidemic in schools**

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. – September 10, 2010. For the first time, the U.S. Congress has designated September 2010 as National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. Governor Mike Beebe has likewise proclaimed the month as National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month in Arkansas. The proclamation, which urges citizens across the state to encourage a healthy and active lifestyle in today's youth, was read by Arkansas First Lady, Ginger Beebe, during an event held today at the Arkansas School for the Deaf in Little Rock.

Dr. Joe Thompson, Surgeon General for Arkansas, led activities at the event titled, Childhood Obesity Awareness Month: Arkansas in Action, which focused on opportunities available to schools to provide evidence-based, active physical education. Dr. Thompson said, "The problem of childhood obesity is well-known in Arkansas where more than one-third of our kids are overweight or obese. The solution is achievable. We have to balance the amount of energy children take in through foods and beverages and the energy they expend through physical activity. We've done a pretty good job of improving the nutrition part of the equation in our schools. Today, we're focused on some of the opportunities available to help schools teach children how to lead physically active lives."

Joining the First Lady and Dr. Thompson were Aaron Black, Executive Director of the Arkansas Tobacco Settlement Commission; Debby Woods, Arkansas Department of Education, Office of Coordinated School Health; and Coach Jon Parker, Arkansas School for the Deaf.

The Arkansas Tobacco Settlement Commission and the Arkansas Department of Education's Office of Coordinated School Health have launched a program called the Child Wellness Intervention Project (CWIP) to promote health and wellness in Arkansas's public schools. CWIP is a grant opportunity through which qualifying schools are provided with funding to supply curricula, training and resources based on the Arkansas Standards for Physical Education to be taught by physical education teachers. Grantees must use funding received to purchase SPARK curriculum and equipment, Fitnessgram, HealthTeacher.com and PE4Life training. To qualify for the grant, schools had to commit to every child

participating in a quality physical education class for at least 120 minutes per week for three years. There are currently 56 schools participating in the program which began this year. Applications are currently being accepted through October 29, 2010 for a second round of grants. For more information on CWIP, visit [www.atsc.arkansas.gov](http://www.atsc.arkansas.gov).

The Arkansas School for the Deaf is one of the schools participating in the CWIP program. During the Childhood Obesity Awareness event, a group of students from the school demonstrated SPARK, led by certified physical education teacher and coach, Jon Parker.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Thompson issued a three-prong challenge for all Arkansans to change the environment where our kids grow, play and learn everyday. He said,

- “Community leaders concerned about childhood obesity should invite an “uninformed” leader in their community to talk about the issues that impact the epidemic. Childhood obesity is not merely a health condition—it is related to safety, access to parks and recreational facilities, fresh and nutritious foods being available locally, sidewalks in every neighborhood, and equitable transportation for everyone. Virtually anyone who is concerned with the health of their community can have a positive impact on reversing childhood obesity.
- People from all sectors of society—parents, grandparents, children, and their friends— should talk directly to their community leaders about the importance of dealing with childhood obesity. By changing our children’s environment so they have access to healthy foods and physical activity, we improve the environment for all members of a community.
- Parents should visit their kid’s school and eat in the cafeteria at least twice each school year to experience first-hand the school food environment and support positive changes to provide healthy foods in the school environment. “

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*ACHI is a nonpartisan, independent, health policy center that serves as a catalyst to improve the health of Arkansans.*



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