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Greater Rochester Health Foundation Awards School Grants for Exciting Innovations to Improve Children’s Health

With outdoor fitness trails, hydroponic greenhouses, and improved fare in the school cafeteria, children in four area elementary schools will start on a lifetime of healthy living with support from the Greater Rochester Health Foundation (GRHF). The Foundation has awarded close to $825,000 to schools in Webster, Penfield and Honeoye Falls/Lima as part of its 10-year commitment to prevent childhood overweight. The funds will be used over a three-year period to help schools incorporate permanent changes in nutrition and physical activity practices for children in grades K – 5. The projects are:

State Road and Schlegel Road Elementary Schools in the Webster Central School District are implementing their “Healthy Choice Challenge” with a grant of $297,308 to develop outdoor trails with fitness stations, a hydroponic agriculture program, interactive equipment such as Dance Dance Revolution and Project Adventure. Physical education instructors trained in evidence-based Physical Best, a comprehensive health/fitness education program, will teach lifetime fitness activities like snowshoeing, Tae-bo, orienteering, disc golf, Nordic walking, bowling, and geo-caching through their physical education classes. The school district is committed to expanding the project to include the other five elementary schools in the district.

“Our ultimate goal is that children will continue to make healthy choices even beyond their school day and become adults who value health and wellness,” said Tara Masci, Curriculum Supervisor for Physical Education, Health and Family & Consumer Science in Webster.

Principals Carmen Gumina from State Road Elementary and Theresa Pulos from Schlegel Road Elementary in Webster agreed, “We are very excited to get our kids moving and improving. Over 20% of our children are overweight or obese and the long-term effects on their health, self-image, and sense of self-worth are too negative for us to ignore. We plan on using the GRHF funding to design fitness rooms and after-school exercise programs that will afford our kids opportunities to move throughout the school...
day. Research has shown us that a student's academic and emotional health steadily improves as their physical conditions improve."

**Cobbles Elementary School** in the Penfield Central School District is putting into action their "M in M (Muscles In Motion)" project through a grant of $293,307 for activities that will keep children moving and eating healthier. Principal Donald Bavis says, "We certainly take great pride in our students' academic growth, but we also care deeply about their personal health and well being." This school will change their cafeteria to entice students to make healthy choices including Healthy Meals to younger children with a Cobbles Coin that can be redeemed for fun items like jump ropes and t-shirts. The hydroponics greenhouse will be incorporated into the science curriculum, as well as into the cafeteria food offerings.

A wellness room will be developed which will have interactive games bikes, treadmills and ellipticals as well as outdoor fitness trail equipment that will accommodate both children and their families. The school supports action-based learning and plan on incorporating it into their programs. Says Marybeth Walker, Coordinator of Physical Education / Health for the Penfield Central School District, "We believe that with the increase in obesity it is critical that we, as educators, find innovative ways to engage our students. We are not only excited to enhance our current programs, but also to work with GRHF in impacting the decisions our students make for the rest of their lives."

**Manor Elementary School** in the Honeoye Falls/Lima Central School District will begin their "EveryBODY moves: Recharging Brains and Bodies through Fitness and Healthy Eating" project with a grant of $230,503. The project will capitalize on children's fascination with interactive technology by creating a Virtual Fitness Lab that will house interactive stationary bikes, interactive Sports Walls, and XerDance. The Virtual Fitness Lab will be used before, during, and after school, as well as during the summer and entice children who may not otherwise be engaged in sufficient daily activity. Manor Elementary School also plans to improve the school cafeteria environment and make the dining experience for students enticing and more enjoyable.

Says Brian Donohue, Director of Athletics, Physical Education, & Health in the Honeoye Falls-Lima Central School District, "We are extremely excited to partner with the Greater Rochester Health Foundation in the fight against childhood obesity. We are grateful for the opportunity this grant provides us to implement the latest fitness technology for our students and to demonstrate to children and their families that living a healthy lifestyle can be fun."

Why the emphasis on physical activity and nutrition for kids? According to John Urban, President and CEO of GRHF, "Over the past 30 years, the obesity rate has nearly tripled for children ages 2-5 years and quadrupled for children ages 6-11 years. Experts speculate that if obesity trends do not change, for the first time in history, children may have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. Schools are a logical setting to pilot innovative programs because no other institution has as much intensive contact with children during their first two decades of life. We hope these schools will serve as models to others in the area."

The four schools met GRHF's criteria for: district leadership that demonstrates strong support for and commitment to increasing physical activity and/or improving nutrition in schools; one or more champions at the school building level who has enthusiasm, is an
inspiration to children and staff and is a role model for living a healthy life style; and who already have implemented activities in the school to increase physical activity and/or improve nutrition in the school.

"We congratulate these four schools on their creative and well-thought out ideas and their commitment to promoting positive lifestyles in their children," said Urban.

Programs are expected to begin in the Fall of 2008.

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