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Press Release

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Healthy Futures Challenge gets Alaska kids to play every day

More than 100 schools across the state sign up for spring challenge

ANCHORAGE — The Healthy Futures Challenge is catching on in Alaska, with almost 10,000 students from 88 schools participating in the fall 2012 challenge. More than 100 schools from the North Slope to Unalaska have already signed up for the spring challenge, which starts Feb. 3 and runs through April.

As part of its Play Every Day campaign, the Department of Health and Social Services partnered with Healthy Futures to help run spring and fall physical activity challenges in Alaska. For the challenge, students from kindergarten to sixth grade keep a log of their physical activities outside of gym class and win prizes for being active. "The Healthy Futures Challenge makes physical activity fun and encourages kids to start a regular habit of being active," said Healthy Futures program director Cindy Norquest. "Daily physical activity empowers youth."

United Way of Anchorage has also joined as a partner in Anchorage to help encourage participation of children in the municipality. "We know that when children are physically active and practice healthy eating behaviors, they are more likely to have better attendance in school, focus on learning and graduate on time," said Michele Brown, president of United Way of Anchorage.

The number of children participating in the challenge has been steadily rising. In spring 2011, before DHSS partnered with Healthy Futures, 36 Alaska schools and 1,342 students participated. During the spring 2012 challenge, participation jumped to 110 schools and almost 7,000 students. During the fall 2012 challenge that finished in November 9,833 students, or 14 percent of Alaska elementary school students, participated.

"Regular physical activity improves academic performance and helps maintain a healthy weight. Alaska children need more time for active play and less time in front of televisions and computers," said Dr. Ward Hurlburt, Alaska's chief medical officer. "Being physically active is critical for good health."

For more information about the challenge, participating schools, and the importance of physical activity, visit www.playeveryday.alaska.gov.

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The State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services promotes and protects the health and well-being of Alaskans. We help individuals and families create safe and healthy communities. For more information, visit <http://dhss.alaska.gov>.

Healthy Futures, the signature program of the nonprofit Alaska Sports Hall of Fame, has been promoting and encouraging childhood physical activity since 2003. Alaska parents concerned about the growing obesity problem in Alaska founded Healthy Futures. For more information, visit www.healthyfuturesak.org.