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Healthy, Fit and Ready to Learn

March 31, 2009 — BOSTON — On Tuesday March 31st, Massachusetts Action for Healthy Kids will hold its 2009 Legislative Breakfast in Great Hall in the State House starting at 9:30am. Legislators, community partners and experts in children's health, wellness and their relation to academics will discuss how we can work together to improve children's health in the Commonwealth. ***The event will emphasize the importance of good nutrition, physical education and physical activity in school districts across the state. State Public Health officials, researchers and community partners will speak about making positive changes happen in schools, overcoming barriers to achieving wellness goals, and identifying needed resources and support.***

Obesity, overweight and inadequate physical activity and nutritional behaviors among youth in Massachusetts continue to be important issues for policymakers to address. In 2007, 11% of Massachusetts high school students were obese and an additional 15% were considered overweight while 29% of middle school students were classified as either obese or overweight. Poor nutritional behaviors are also a concern –just 14% of middle school students reported consuming three or more servings of vegetables but 40% reported drinking non-diet soda the day before. Only (41%) of Massachusetts' high school students report achieving the recommended level of daily physical activity and just 61% of Massachusetts high school students participate in physical education classes (www.mass.gov/dph).

These issues concern leaders in policy, health and education. Virginia Chomitz, PhD, Senior Scientist, Institute for Community Health, Cambridge MA and one of the featured program speakers notes that, *"Our research found that physically fit students were more likely to pass MCAS standardized academic achievement tests than less fit students. This supports other evidence that health and fitness are important foundations for school success and academic achievement. Investing in physical education and active before- and after-school programs and recess may serve to improve both students' physical and academic fitness."*

In addition to Dr. Chomitz, Dr. Lauren Smith, Medical Director of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Jacqueline Morgan, President of the Massachusetts School Nutrition Association will be speaking at the event. The event will also feature the Beantown Jumpers presenting Double Dutch, coached by Patti Travers, the Physical Education and Health Education Teacher at Boston's William E. Russell Elementary School.

About Massachusetts AFHK

Massachusetts Action for Healthy Kids is a non-profit, volunteer organization dedicated to improving children's nutrition, physical education and physical activity by collaborating with stakeholders to advocate, educate, promote and implement local and statewide initiatives to enhance the school health environment. The Massachusetts team is an affiliate of national Action for Healthy Kids. For more information on the Massachusetts Action for Healthy Kids State Team and to join the team, please visit www.actionforhealthykids.org.