

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



## NEWS RELEASE

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### Healthy, Fit and Ready to Learn

March 25, 2010 — BOSTON — On Thursday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, Massachusetts Action for Healthy Kids will hold its 2010 Legislative Breakfast in Nurses Hall in the State House starting at 9:30 am. The event will gather legislators, award-winning community partners and experts in children's health to discuss how together we can improve the health and academic achievement of children in the Commonwealth.

**The event will highlight the latest data on the obesity epidemic among Massachusetts students and the importance of good nutrition, physical education and physical activity in school districts across the state.**

The event will feature several speakers, including Dr. Jewel Mullen, Director of the Bureau of Community Health Access and Promotion at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, who will discuss efforts to systematically prevent and reduce childhood obesity and Mary Jo McLarney, Food Service Director at Somerville Public Schools. In 2008-2009, four Somerville schools achieved HealthierUS status, which designates an elite group of schools nationwide for excellence in health, nutrition and fitness. Additionally, Mark Berthiaume and Bill Long from the Worcester Public Schools will be recognized for outstanding Physical Education programs.

The event will commence with a recess demonstration by 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade junior coaches in the Playworks program at the Hennigan Elementary School in Boston, MA. Playworks Junior Coaches receive 10 hours of training in game facilitation, conflict resolution skills and leadership development and lead recess games for their peers.

The Somerville Public Schools will be providing the breakfast, sponsored by the Massachusetts Dietetic Association.

Inadequate physical activity and poor nutrition among youth in Massachusetts are urgent issues for policymakers to address. In 2009, 25% of Massachusetts high school students were overweight or obese. Only 14% of students reported eating 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day, while 25% report drinking at least one can of soda per day; 43% of middle and high schools permitted the sale of foods like candy, soda and cookies outside of the school food service program. Many middle school (67%) and high school (66%) students in Massachusetts do not achieve recommended levels of physical activity (60 minutes a day) on at least 5 days per week and 41% of high school students did not attend a physical education class during an average school week. A full quarter (25%) of middle and high schools do not require physical education in all grades.

These data were compiled by the Massachusetts Coordinated School Health Program from the 2009 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey and 2009 Massachusetts Youth Health Survey, and the 2008 School Health Profiles into a fact sheet on the obesity epidemic and Massachusetts students ([www.mass.gov/dph](http://www.mass.gov/dph) and [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)).

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, please visit [www.actionforhealthykids.org](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org).