

USD #377 Atchison County Community Schools News Release



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PROJECT FIT AMERICA teams up with the Heartland Foundation to get kids physically fit in Atchison County

**Event Kickoff: October 18, 2006
Time: 10 a.m.
Location: Cummings Elementary School**

You are invited to attend this important event. This is the day that Cummings Elementary School, USD 377, will formally take an honored role as a host and model school for Project Fit America (PFA).

The Cummings Elementary School staff and students, district officials, along with representatives from Heartland Foundation, St. Joseph, Missouri, Parent Volunteers, the ACCMS Band, and a surprise guest will dedicate the project launch with the students demonstrating the PFA fitness equipment. Please join us and see a solution that works to turn around the sedentary lifestyles of our nation's youth.

Never before have there been so many out-of-shape, overweight and inactive American children. Since 1980, childhood obesity has tripled according to the U.S. Surgeon General's Report.

In answer to this alarming trend, Project Fit America provides a research-based solution that works. Formed in 1990, PFA is a nonprofit organization that donates all-inclusive fitness programs to schools, creating new opportunities for children to be active, fit and healthy as part of the everyday school experience. Programming includes state-of-the-art outdoor fitness equipment that is specifically designed to address the deficit areas where children fail fitness tests. A dynamic curriculum with fitness games and challenges the kids play on the PFA equipment, indoor mobile fitness equipment with programming, and in-class instruction on subjects such as smoking intervention, nutrition, and understanding your body are included. PFA also provides support to the school for two years with training on site.

In the past 16 years since PFA's inception, hospitals have been the primary sponsors of the program, contributing over \$6 million dollars. Schools are selected via a local grant program in the sponsors' service areas. PFA is now operating in more than 500 schools in over 250 cities in 42 states.

The Heartland Foundation launched this initiative in 1998. Over the past 8 years, more than 30 schools in the four corner's region have had the PFA program donated to their campuses. Many of the schools have become national exemplary physical education programs under the guidance of their all-star teachers. PFA customizes programming to

each school and we invite you to come see the six new schools launching this fall. North Harrison R-11, Dogwood Elementary, Union Star R-11, and Elkhorn Elementary schools in Missouri, and Horton Elementary and Cummings Elementary in Kansas, are this year's grant recipients. Together they become exemplary model schools in the community, impacting over 15,000 children and their families by working together to increase fitness levels to make kids more active, fit and healthy.

Schools report proven results with increased motivation and morale, with students choosing fitness activities over sedentary activities. Post-testing results reported by PFA schools across the country show an average increase of 25.3% in upper body strength, 5.8% in abdominal strength, and an 8.5% increase in cardiovascular endurance.

"Physical education and fitness related activities continue to be cut and/or poorly funded, at a time when childhood obesity and related illnesses are at epidemic levels," says PFA's Executive Director, Stacey Cook. "Our children's health is too important to sit idly by, which is why we applaud Heartland Foundation for taking this leadership role to bring programming to Atchison County."

It is vital to get kids active and put fitness back into play.

- The government estimates 6 million American children are now overweight enough to endanger their health.
- An additional 5 million are on the threshold and the problem is growing even more extreme as it becomes more widespread.
- Ten years ago, the medical community found that Type 2 diabetes did not occur until after 40 years of age. Now it is regularly found in pediatric patients.
- The lack of fitness and health awareness contributes to many problems as cited by classroom teachers. Some examples include:
 - Lack of self-esteem
 - Hyperactivity
 - Aggressive behavior resulting in classroom disruptions and playground fights
 - Experimenting with unsafe diet practices (fasting, diet pills, purging)

"These findings are the basis for the Heartland Foundation's sponsorship of Project Fit America. This program is a showcase for the long-term commitment we have made to the health and well-being of children and families of our community," stated Karen Acord, Program Manager.

Project Fit America
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