

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Marks improve when kids are active

Active Healthy Kids Canada Releases 2009 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

TORONTO (ONTARIO) JUNE 2, 2009 – If you're looking to have your kids excel in school, you may want to cut down on extra homework and spend some time at a park or playground with them.

According to the 2009 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, children who are physically active perform better in school than those who are not. Interestingly, academic performance improves even when academic learning time is reduced to allow time for physical activity. The Report Card was released today by Active Healthy Kids Canada and its strategic partners, ParticipACTION and the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Research Institute – Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (HALO).

"Schools and parents who replace children's physical activity time with academic study to improve their academic performance should think again," says Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chief Scientific Officer, Active Healthy Kids Canada, and director at CHEO-HALO. "Time spent getting active in school, on the playground or in a park can improve learning in the classroom."

The Report Card notes that by improving memory, concentration and attention span, physical activity positively impacts children's achievement in math, reading, grades, perceptual skill and overall academic readiness. Physical activity has also been shown to increase a child's self-confidence, self-esteem, self-image and connection to school.

Ontario children who participated in a comprehensive school health initiative that included physical activity as a key element showed a 36 per cent increase in reading and a 24 per cent increase in math scores over a two-year period.¹ Similar findings are mirrored in various international, national and regional studies.

Disturbingly, despite the academic and health benefits of physical activity, for the third consecutive year, the 2009 Report Card assigned an F for Physical Activity Levels. Only 13 per cent of Canadian children and youth are meeting the minimum recommendation of 90 minutes of physical activity a day.

"The health benefits of physical activity are understood," says Michelle Brownrigg, Chief Executive Officer, Active Healthy Kids Canada (Toronto). "Now, with growing evidence that physical activity enhances academic performance, there's another important reason to get Canadian children to turn off the screens and get moving. Governments, schools, communities and parents need to work together to ensure Canada's youth get the physical activity they desperately need."

¹ Guertin M. *An examination of the effect of a comprehensive school health model on academic achievement – The effect of living school on EQAO test scores.* Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto; 2007.

Again this year, the Report Card assigned an F for Screen Time, as 90 per cent of Canadian children and youth are spending far too much time in front of television, computer and video screens. Although the rise in popularity of active video games means screen time is no longer a completely sedentary activity, active gaming is not a replacement for physical activity. It does not require the same levels of energy expenditure, nor does it offer the same opportunities for outdoor play or social interaction.

“There are plenty of simple ways to add more movement into our children’s lives,” says Kelly Murumets, President and CEO, ParticipACTION. “Make physical activity a part of your family routine by encouraging free play, walking or biking to school and trading in the screen time for active time.”

Physical activity builds strong, smart kids. Strong, smart kids are the foundation of a strong, smart society that we need in tough times—and will lead us to better times. This year’s Report Card reveals that we have a toe-hold on change and that Canada is slowly moving in the right direction. However, increased and continued commitment is required at all levels of government, communities, schools and within families to ensure this movement continues, and positive and measurable change is achieved.

Among the 19 grades assigned in the Report Card, key findings include:

- “D” for Usage of Facilities, Programs, Parks and Playgrounds
- “B” for school Infrastructure and Equipment
- “C-“ for Physical Education in schools
- “B+” for Community Programming
- “C+” for Provincial Government Strategies and Investment
- “D” for Municipal Policies and Regulations

About the Report Card

The 2009 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, conducted by Active Healthy Kids Canada, was developed in collaboration with other organizations to build and enhance its foundation as a credible knowledge source and to effectively disseminate evidence-informed communications across the sector. CHEO-HALO worked with Active Healthy Kids Canada’s research group to lead the coordination, data collection and data analysis necessary to develop the Report Card, and provided access to the latest research findings. ParticipACTION provided communications management to produce and deliver the Report Card. A full copy of the report can be found at www.activehealthykids.ca.

About Active Healthy Kids Canada

Active Healthy Kids Canada was established as a charitable organization in 1994 to advocate the importance of physical activity for children and youth where they live, learn and play. As a national leader in this area, Active Healthy Kids Canada advances knowledge to influence decision - makers at all levels, from policy - makers to parents, in order to increase the attention given to, investment in, and effective implementation of physical activity opportunities for all Canadian children and youth. Production of the Report Card has been made possible through financial support from the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Lawson Foundation, Kellogg’s and the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

***About CHEO Research Institute –
Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group***

Responding to an alarming rise in childhood obesity, the Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (HALO) has been established to provide national leadership and research excellence for the prevention and treatment of obesity in children and youth. This centre of excellence is comprised of a multidisciplinary group of research scientists, clinicians, and research staff who are working with local, provincial and national partners to address obesity and inactivity in children and youth. Located in the Research Institute of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO), HALO is developing and testing innovative treatments and prevention strategies for the health and wellness of our most precious resource, our children.

About ParticipACTION

ParticipACTION is the national voice of physical activity and sport participation in Canada. Originally established in 1971, ParticipACTION was re-launched in 2007 to help prevent the looming inactivity and obesity crisis that faces Canada. As a national not-for-profit organization solely dedicated to inspiring and supporting healthy and active living for Canadians, it works with its partners, which include sport, physical activity, recreation organizations, government and corporate sponsors, to inspire and support Canadians to move more. ParticipACTION is generously supported by Sport Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada. For more information, visit www.participACTION.com.

-30-

For more information, copies of the report or b-roll, to schedule an interview or speak to a spokesperson, please contact:

Katherine Janson
ParticipACTION
(416) 913-1471
kjanson@participACTION.com

Andrea Wooland
Hill & Knowlton Canada
(416) 413-4698
andrea.wooland@hillandknowlton.ca