



California Task Force

on youth and workplace wellness

June 17, 2003

Dear Superintendents:

The primary responsibility of schools is to foster academic achievement, and nutrition is an essential building block for school success. Healthy, active, and well-nourished children are more prepared to learn, more likely to attend school and class, and able to take advantage of educational opportunities.

However, California's children are facing an **epidemic** of obesity and inactivity. The childhood obesity epidemic in California continues to grow each year, with nearly **76 percent of California's students considered unfit**, and over a quarter overweight. Children who are overweight have a high likelihood of becoming overweight adults, a condition which contributes to a wide range of life-long health problems and can ultimately detract from the student's school experience as well as their future workforce participation.

This crisis is perpetuated by **unhealthy environments**, and schools have a significant role to play in providing students with healthy environments and modeling healthy food and physical activity choices.

The first annual California Superintendent's Challenge is a joint challenge and award program from State Superintendent Jack O'Connell and the California Task Force on Youth and Workplace Wellness. Superintendent O'Connell and the Task Force are challenging local school districts across California to **improve the nutrition standards** and health of all their students through the development and implementation of policies that promote **proper nutrition** and **regular physical activity**.

The California Taskforce on Youth and Workplace Wellness was launched by the State Legislature in 2002 to address the critical issues of fitness and nutritional health in California's schools and workplaces. As a public/private taskforce, the Wellness Taskforce brings together educators, health advocates, health providers, athletes and legislators. The mission of this cross-sector taskforce is to create and promote policies which decrease the obesity rates in California's schools and workplaces. More resources for school districts and employers interested in creating healthy environments are available at www.wellnesstaskforce.org.

Everyone has a role to play in addressing the obesity epidemic. While schools cannot meet all the nutrition-related needs of students, schools are particularly well-suited to contribute to students' nutrition well-being. As a high-school track coach in Antioch, I witnessed the strong relationship between nutrition, physical activity, and learning. Young people spend a significant amount of time in the school environment, and we have a responsibility to

I applaud those efforts already occurring on the local level to meet SB 19 nutrition standards, promote physical activity and turn the curve on childhood obesity and malnutrition. I encourage those districts already addressing this issue to apply for state-wide recognition, and challenge districts that have not yet considered the impact of nutrition on student learning to make their students' nutritional health a priority in the upcoming school year.

The Challenge Award application will be available in September 2003 on the CDE website and at www.wellnesstaskforce.org.

Good Luck!

Sincerely,

Senator Tom Torlakson