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## **SCHOOLS CHIEF O'CONNELL ISSUES THE "SUPERINTENDENT'S CHALLENGE"**

SACRAMENTO – State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell is calling upon all California school districts to make their students' nutritional health and physical fitness a priority and help combat the state's childhood obesity epidemic.

The first annual California Superintendent's Challenge is a coordinated effort between O'Connell and the California Task Force on Youth and Workplace Wellness, a joint initiative of the state Legislature launched last year to address the critical issues of fitness and nutritional health in schools and workplaces.

O'Connell is teaming up with Task Force Chairman Sen. Tom Torlakson to challenge local school districts across California to improve the health of their students through the development and implementation of policies that promote proper nutrition and regular physical activity.

"Even during difficult budget times like this one, nutrition and fitness should be a priority for all schools and districts," O'Connell said. "Our schools have an exceptional opportunity to guide our children toward healthier lifestyles."

Each school district that takes up The Challenge by providing healthier meals and nutrition education will receive recognition from O'Connell, the California Department of Education (CDE) and the state Senate, along with a cash award of up to \$2,000 from Stonyfield Farm, a New Hampshire-based company that has been acknowledged for its environmental and nutritional advocacy efforts.

Healthy, well-nourished children are more likely to attend school and are more prepared and motivated to learn. Furthermore, the childhood obesity epidemic in California continues to grow each year, with nearly 76 percent of the state's students considered unfit, and more than a quarter overweight.

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In the spirit of Senate Bill 19, which beginning in January requires that food sold at elementary and middle schools meet certain nutritional standards, the Superintendent's Challenge awards will reflect the depth and breadth of physical activity and nutritional education programs.

The Superintendent's Challenge will:

- Seek out and recognize sustainable and exemplary physical activity and nutrition policies that have been developed and successfully implemented by California teachers, parents, school boards, and administrators;
- Promote current nutrition policy models that are making a demonstrated difference for students' access to healthy foods during school; and
- Award resources to the most exemplary programs in order to further support and promote the implementation and sustainability of successful nutrition policies.

The Superintendent's Challenge award application will be available in September on the CDE Web site at [www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov) and at the Task Force Web site at [www.wellnesstaskforce.org](http://www.wellnesstaskforce.org) .

In order for districts to qualify for The Challenge, a district-wide healthy foods or nutritional health policy must have been passed by the district governing board by November 1, 2003. Only districts with both policies and implementation plans will be considered. All applications are due on February 16, 2004. Judging and on-site visitations will occur in April and award winners will be announced next May.

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