



Charlie Crist
Governor

Ana M. Viamonte-Ros, M.D., M.P.H.
State Surgeon General

PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

January 28, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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200 Tampa Bay Kids are Ready to Bite Back

They will join a force of more than 3,000 students in Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties to spread the word on Big Fat Industries and Couch Potato Companies.

January 28, 2008 – Elementary school students are the key to making a dent in the childhood obesity epidemic. This, according to the Kidz Bite Back campaign in Tampa Bay, which today trained more than 200 kids at Gulfport Elementary to join a movement of more than three thousand students to educate their friends and families about Big Fat Industries and Couch Potato Companies.

Kidz Bite Back is the nation's only grassroots, peer-to-peer campaign for elementary school students. It provides education on the influence fast food, soft drink and junk food companies have on eating habits, and the influence TV networks and video game companies have on physical activity.

Julie Ryczek, a member of the Governor's Council on Physical Activity and a Pinellas County school teacher, spoke to the more than 200 students at today's Kidz Bite Back Summit. "Governor Crist charged the Council with developing a statewide plan to increase each Floridian's level of physical fitness through regular exercise and sound nutrition practices, Ryczek said. "The Kidz Bite Back campaign is a grassroots effort that gives fourth and fifth graders tools to combat deceptive marketing practices of the big fat industries. The 'Kidz Advocates' use their leadership skills to train their fellow classmates on these important issues."

"The health of children in our country would improve greatly if every child in would eat better and be more active," said Mike Aubin, administrator of St. Joseph's Children's Hospital. "The program encourages kids to make healthy decisions that can permanently improve their lives."

The Pinellas County Health Department was the initial sponsor of Tampa Bay's Kidz Bite Back campaign, which began in Fall 2007 with 16 schools (eight in Pinellas County, eight in Hillsborough County), and three other partners: St. Joseph's Children's Hospital, Allegany Franciscan Ministries and the Hillsborough County Health Department. Both school districts are partners.

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“All the partners hope to add more schools next year. We all agree we have the best childhood obesity prevention program in the nation,” said Ronalda Futtrell-Hobson MSPH, ARNP, assistant director of the Pinellas County Health Department, noting that the University of South Florida’s College of Public Health is evaluating the campaign. “There are too many programs that want to be part of the solution, but are not being evaluated for effectiveness. The Kidz Bite Back partners strongly believe in measurement and evaluation.”

Students participated in “Big Fat Industries 101” and “Couch Potatoes 101” presentations. Students also learned Big Fat Math, a web-based activity where children can learn how much activity it will take to burn off fast food, soft drink and junk food products. One student learned he would have to walk six hours and 20 minutes without a break to burn off a Big Mac. Kids can learn Big Fat Math online by visiting www.bigfatmath.com.

“These kids now know more than 95 percent of the American population on this topic, and they’re going to be spreading the word to their friends and families,” said Douglas A. Holt, M.D., director of the Hillsborough County Health Department. “Children learn so much from their peers. That’s what makes this a great grassroots program.”

After attending the Big Fat Industries 101 and Couch Potato Companies 101 sessions, kids become “Kidz,” who are literally smarter than most adults on the deceptive marketing practices of these companies. And Kidz are spreading the word to their families, relatives, friends and neighbors!

For more information:

Allegany Franciscan Ministries www.afmfl.org
Governor’s Council on Physical Activity www.healthyfloridians.com
Hillsborough County Health Department www.hillscountyhealth.org
Hillsborough County Schools www.sdhc.k12.fl.us
Kidz Bite Back www.kidzbiteback.com
Pinellas County Health Department www.pinellashealth.com
Pinellas County Schools www.pinellas.k12.fl.us
St. Joseph’s Children’s Hospital www.sjbhealth.org

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