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FEBRUARY 27, 2008

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Governor Crist Announces Eight-Week Fitness Challenge for Elementary Students

~ Invites students and schools to lead healthy lives by establishing healthy habits ~

TAMPA – Governor Charlie Crist today announced a new program for Florida's students, aimed at helping them improve their lives through physical fitness. The Governor's Fitness Challenge will provide guidance and incentives to schools in helping boost physical fitness for children. The Governor announced the program at Bellamy Elementary School in Tampa, Norma Butler Bossard Elementary School in Miami, and Millennia Elementary School in Orlando. Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp visited Trafalgar Elementary School in Fort Myers to unveil the program to students there.

"Studies show that healthy living habits begin at an early age, and I am committed to improving the health of all Floridians, starting with our students," Governor Crist said. "I am grateful for the work of the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and the other organizations that have contributed to developing this program. I urge all of Florida's elementary schools to get involved and encourage their students to take the Governor's Fitness Challenge as a means to improving their overall health."

The Governor's Fitness Challenge will be piloted this year in Florida's elementary schools and will expand to include middle schools in 2008-09. The challenge is one component of the legislation Governor Crist signed last spring requiring 150 minutes of physical education each week for elementary school students. This bill, championed by Representative Will Weatherford (R-Wesley Chapel) and Senator Lee Constantine (R-Altamonte Springs), took effect starting in the 2007-08 school year.

"It was an honor to sponsor the physical fitness bill on behalf of Governor Crist in the Florida

House of Representatives," Representative Will Weatherford said. "Like the Governor, I am committed to the health and well-being of Florida's students and will continue to advocate for them, both in my district and statewide."

Governor Crist also issued a challenge today to Florida's athletes to become involved in their local schools by committing up to one hour per month inspiring and teaching children how to lead healthier lives. A competitive component of this program allows schools to vie for cash prizes toward the purchase of physical fitness equipment and will provide recognition for participating students.

"For the past four years I have worked to put physical education back into Florida's schools," Senator Lee Constantine said. "Last year we were successful in guaranteeing physical education as part of the elementary school day and it is essential we re-introduce it to all our middle school students. It is scientifically proven that physical activity facilitates learning and therefore, it is vital that PE becomes an element of our children's education."

The program has been developed from recommendations made by the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness. Champion Sponsor SunTrust Banks Inc. is providing funding for the purchase of fitness equipment for winning schools and student incentives. Technology for Fitness Sponsor AT&T is supporting incentives for schools and children, and is funding the creation of a comprehensive Web site. Activities for the fitness program have been developed in conjunction with in-kind sponsor Titus Sports Academy, a sports conditioning program.



***Governor Crist and Sponsors announce the Governor's Fitness Challenge
February 27, 2008 at Bellamy Elementary in Tampa***

(L-R) Daniel Mahurin, Chairman, President & CEO of SunTrust Bank, Tampa Bay; Marshall Criser, President of AT&T; Governor Charlie Crist; and David Andreychuk, professional hockey player and member of the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness.

"SunTrust is honored to help to ensure the best future for Florida's youth by making a contribution of \$100,000 to Governor Crist's Fitness Challenge in Florida's schools," said Tom Kuntz, chairman, president and CEO of SunTrust Banks, Florida. "We understand that today's students will become tomorrow's employees, customers, and citizens. For this reason, we are pleased to help them develop a commitment to fitness that will enhance their quality of life now and in years to come."

"The Governors' Fitness Challenge addresses the importance of physical fitness in the development of healthy children," Marshall Criser, president of AT&T Florida said. "AT&T recognizes that challenging and rewarding our youth for achievement in physical fitness, as well as academic success, is critical to developing the talent of the future. We are delighted to support Florida's students as they strive to be their very best."

Schools will be asked to register their commitment to participate online by March 7 at www.GovernorsFitnessChallenge.com. Participating students will invest two or three days each week totaling 90 minutes in order to improve in five skill activities related to strength, endurance, flexibility, speed and agility. Final reports will be due online by May 9. Schools will be able to record student participation on the Web site, and will have the option of tracking student improvement.

At the end of the pilot program in May, four public or private schools with at least 50 percent of students participating will be randomly selected to receive \$5,000 toward the purchase of sports or fitness equipment for their schools. Four additional public schools with at least 50 percent participation and who demonstrated improvement in students' fitness performance areas will be randomly selected to receive \$10,000 toward the purchase of sports or fitness equipment.

At least one participating school with at least 25 percent participation will be entered into a drawing to have a Florida professional athlete or Olympian come to the school to speak with students. Children in winning schools will receive an official Governor's Fitness Challenge T-shirt, and all students participating will receive Governor's Fitness Challenge certificates and stickers. Schools with at least 50 percent of students participating will be designated as **Governor's Fitness Champion Schools** and will receive a Governor's Fitness Challenge window decal and flag.

The Governor's Fitness Challenge Web site will also provide additional support to schools and families with students participating in the challenge. Students will also be encouraged to engage in physical activity outside of the school environment. Each week a new activity theme will be unveiled on the Governor's Fitness Challenge Web site, featuring podcasts from popular Olympians and professional athletes that encourage students to get more active. Themes will feature safety tips and fun, healthy recipes that families can prepare together. Schools can incorporate the weekly sessions by offering extra credit points to students who try one of the home-based activities or recipes from the challenge Web site.

One goal of the Governor's Fitness Challenge is to reach as many children as possible. The main activities and exercises of the eight-week challenge can be modified to accommodate students with special needs or disabilities. Homeschool students and students who attend a school that does not participate in the challenge can still participate individually. Assistance for modifying and implementing the program for these groups will be available throughout the challenge.

The program has been developed by the Executive Office of Governor Charlie Crist, the Florida Department of Health, Titus Sports Academy and the Governor's Volunteer Florida Foundation. This fitness challenge is not meant to replace any existing fitness programs, but to provide one more opportunity for Florida's students to develop healthy living habits. To learn more about the Governor's Fitness Challenge, please visit www.GovernorsFitnessChallenge.com.

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