



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 24, 2007

Media Contacts: Wendy Peters Moschetti
Metro Denver Health and Wellness Commission
303.477.9985

Haley McKean
Webb PR
303.796.8888

Survey reveals school board candidates' positions on student wellness
Healthy eating and physical activity championed as link to academic achievement

DENVER – The Metro Denver Health & Wellness Commission (MDHWC) and Children's Health Foundation (CHF) today released the results of a survey of candidates for statewide district school boards, gauging their positions on nutrition and physical activity in schools. The individual and aggregate responses of the 92 participating candidates may be viewed at www.mdhwc.org and www.childrenshealthfoundation.net.

Although Colorado currently boasts one of the nation's lowest rates of obesity and highest rates of physical activity in the nation, school-age children are tipping the scales at an unhealthy rate. Nearly 15 percent of Colorado children ages 2–14 years are overweight or obese, and another 13.8 percent are at risk for becoming overweight or obese, according to the 2004 Child Health Survey conducted by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. MDHWC and CHF's shared mission is to move this trend in a healthier direction by promoting policy changes to incorporate daily physical activity, healthful foods and nutrition education in schools.

Student achievement, healthy lifestyles linked

MDHWC and CHF co-sponsored the survey to ask candidates running for seats this November for Colorado local school district boards to share their stance regarding food selection and inclusion of physical activity in schools. Of the 329 candidates who received the survey by mail or email, 28 percent completed the online survey hosted by Zoomerang. Notably, all 92 survey-respondents agreed that academic achievement is either greatly or moderately linked to healthy eating and physical activity. Further, 92 percent supported 30 minutes of daily exercise through physical education, and 92 percent supported minimum nutrition standards on all food and beverages sold in schools.

"It's extremely critical for us to have strong and supportive school districts and school leaders across Colorado if we want success in our fight against childhood obesity," said Lt. Gov. Barbara O'Brien, chair of MDHWC. "If we're preparing Colorado's more than 700,000 students for a 21st century global economy, we have to be as concerned about their health as we are about their academic training."

Colorado is among the 30 percent of states that do not mandate physical education. The survey revealed that 90 percent of responding school board candidates felt physical education should at least be available for all schools and grades, and 63 percent responded that it should be mandatory in schools. Meanwhile, according to the 2004 Colorado Child Health Survey, 94 percent of Colorado parents strongly supported physical education requirements and healthy food options in schools.

“Studies show that students participating in daily physical education exhibit better attendance, a more positive attitude to school, and superior academic performance,” said Dr. Jim Hill, Director of the Center for Human Nutrition at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center and chair of the MDHWC Executive Committee. “Schools have the unique opportunity to improve the standards of what goes into students’ minds and bodies.”

Beyond the classroom, MDHWC promotes policies that encourage 30 minutes of daily, age-appropriate moderate to vigorous physical activity outside of the school day through community activities. Further, the Commission believes that all children and youth should participate annually in a minimum of 20 coordinated nutrition education and promotion activities in early childhood and school settings; including providing family involvement opportunities at least 3 times a year. The survey results indicated that responding school board candidates also largely support both these ideas by 78 percent.

“We all remember our coach, P.E. teacher or parent who pushed us to be stronger and healthier. Smart choices should start at home and stem from every role model and activity in a child’s life,” said Elaine Gantz Berman, Chair of the MDHWC Schools & Early Childhood Team and State Board of Education member. “By providing good examples of healthy living, we can help students build habits that last for a lifetime.”

The survey results are available to the public in advance of the November 6 elections. Both incumbent and new candidates were included in the survey distribution.

About the Metro Denver Health and Wellness Commission: The MDHWC is comprised of nearly 80 key leaders from Metro Denver academic, business, government, public health, health care, non-profit and philanthropic organizations. The Commission’s vision is to make Metro Denver “America’s Healthiest Community,” with a focus on promoting programs and policies that support a culture of healthy eating and active living in schools, worksites, and communities and promote our economic wellbeing.

About the Children’s Health Foundation: The Children’s Health Foundation is a non-profit organization formed in 2004 to advance preventive and integrative health initiatives that benefit the mind, body and spirit of children. The Foundation aims to create systemic changes in schools to ensure school safety, prevent childhood obesity, and reduce stress-related pathologies in children.

###