

Weiner Elementary Receives Grant

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COREY CLAIRDAY

The Arkansas Tobacco Settlement Commission (ATSC) has announced the awards for its 2011 Child Wellness Intervention Project (CWIP) Grant Program.

In a ceremony on the second floor rotunda of the Arkansas State Capitol last Friday, a total of \$16,900.13 was awarded to Weiner Elementary School by Dr. Joe Thompson, Arkansas Surgeon General and Commissioners of the Arkansas Tobacco Settlement Commission.

Weiner Elementary School received two grants, one for kindergarten through second grade totaling \$8,180.58 and one for grades three through six for \$8,719.55. According to Christy Buchanan, Weiner Elementary physical education teacher, the grant money will go toward new physical education equipment for next school year.

Buchanan said she will attend a two-week training session over the summer to learn about the physical education program, which is a requirement of the grant.

"We're very excited to have this physical education equipment," Buchanan said. "We'll be able to order the equipment of our choice for next year. I'll know after the training this summer."

More than one third of Arkansas's public school children are overweight or obese, and Arkansas ranks eighth in the nation for childhood obesity.

The Commission's CWIP initiative focuses on reducing childhood obesity by increasing physical activity through quality education programs and providing critical health education. The Commission has partnered with the Arkansas Department of Education's Office of Coordinated School Health, Arkansas Children's Hospital and the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement to accomplish this goal.

ATSC board chair Susan Hanrahan, PhD, commended the commission for developing this unique partnership.

"The CWIP initiative reflects the joint commitment of both traditional and non-traditional partners in improving the health of Arkansas children," she said. "Each of the partner organizations contributes a vital perspective that has helped to shape a program that will have a sustained impact on physical fitness."

The Commission awarded a total of \$656,792.01 in grants to 44 individual schools in 28 districts around the state. In the 2011-2012 school year, over 8,500 students will participate in the CWIP program. Dr. Tom Kimbrell applauded the initiative of school personnel and expressed appreciation for the resources provided by ATSC.

"Educators understand the connection between student achievement and physical well-being," Dr. Kimbrell said. "We are excited about the opportunities these grant funds will provide in helping our students achieve healthier lifestyles."

Funding for this grant came from the Arkansas Tobacco Settlement Proceeds Act -- an act passed by 64 percent of Arkansas voters in 2000. This act specified that tobacco settlement funds received by Arkansas should be used exclusively to improve the health of Arkansans through smoking prevention and cessation, increased access to health care and health education, and investment in important medical research.

The CWIP initiative will be evaluated by the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement's Health Data Initiative, led by Dr. Joe Thompson, ACHI director and Arkansas Surgeon General. According to Dr. Thompson, the evaluation will measure several factors expected to be impacted by the program, including obesity prevention and academic performance.

"We know that adequate physical activity balanced with good nutrition is a key factor in reversing the childhood obesity epidemic that is robbing our kids of a healthy, productive future," Dr. Thompson said. "There is growing evidence that physical activity also improves academic performance and reduces behavioral problems in schools. Through evaluation of the CWIP program, we plan to provide an evidence-based model for other schools to follow."

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