



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **CATCH CELEBRATES SUCCESS AT JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Hasbrouck Heights, NJ – Feb. 24, 2009. The childhood obesity epidemic has reached monumental proportions in the United States, putting obese children and adolescents at risk for health problems during their youth as well as into adulthood. According to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, “over the past three decades, the childhood obesity rate has more than doubled for preschool children aged 2-5 years and adolescents aged 12-19, and has more than tripled for children aged 6-11 years.

In an effort to combat childhood obesity, more and more schools and organizations are taking steps to enhance their physical activity programs, focus on nutrition and advocate for a healthier school and home environment. Jefferson Elementary School in Maplewood is one example of a school in New Jersey that is making a difference in children’s health through Coordinated Approach To Child Health program (CATCH®).

CATCH made its debut in New Jersey in the Fall of 2007 with a pilot program at Jefferson Elementary School. The project kicked-off with a CATCH training on September 5<sup>th</sup> that year and since then, CATCH has been embraced wholeheartedly by the school’s staff, students and parents. Judy LoBianco, Supervisor of Health, Physical Education and Nursing Services, South Orange-Maplewood School District in New Jersey brought the CATCH program to her school district based on the research out of the University of Texas. “The formula of CATCH that includes saturating all facets of the community with the messages of wellness has proved to help children internalize the learning and make better choices, not just while they are experiencing CATCH, but long after,” remarked LoBianco.

CATCH is an evidence-based, nationally recognized coordinated school health program designed to promote physical activity and healthy food choices in children in grades K-5. The program brings schools, students, parents and the community together through its four core components:

- Classroom curriculum
- Physical education
- Child nutrition services
- Family involvement.

CATCH research was designed to reduce risk factors in chronic disease and research has shown an improvement in children’s self-reported eating behaviors, an increase in physical activity levels, improvements in the nutrient status of school lunch with reduction of fat content, and in El Paso, an actual reduction in child obesity levels. In addition to educational materials on nutrition and physical activity, the national publisher and distributor of the CATCH program resource materials, FlagHouse Inc., offers training, resources and grant-writing guidance.

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The program began as a research study funded by the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute in 1991 to help elementary schools, children and their families adopt healthy eating and physical activity behaviors. Research teams from the University of Texas-Houston, Tulane University, University of Minnesota, and the University of California, participated in what is still the largest and most rigorous school-based health promotion trial ever conducted.

In 2006, the United States Department of Health and Human Services awarded CATCH with the *Secretary's Innovation and Prevention Award*. The program has also been recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the American Council for Fitness. Today, over 7,500 schools across the United States and Canada implement the CATCH program.

Since CATCH was implemented at Jefferson Elementary over a year ago, there have been many positive changes at the school. Wholesome lunches are being promoted and there has been an increase in the consumption of fruits and vegetables at the school; including a fruit and vegetable tasting of the month. Principal Dr. Maryrose Caulfield-Sloan has instituted a policy to allow students to eat outside during nice weather. This policy has reduced disciplinary issues and provided the opportunity for students to engage in more physical activity after lunch.

Staff at Jefferson have integrated nutrition concepts into areas such as social studies, math, English and technology lessons. LoBianco said, "One of the most inspirational lessons I saw involved classification in science. Students cut out foods from a magazine and classified them on posters as GO, SLOW or WHOA foods. In another class, students in a technology lesson put together pictures from their CATCH experiences for a PowerPoint presentation. In their English class, they wrote about their experiences with the CATCH program."

A CATCH committee at Jefferson meets each month and encourages parents to get involved in healthy lessons and events as well. The committee works with parents and the school cafeteria to motivate students to try a variety of foods. "Family CATCH Fun Nights" are held so that parents can learn about nutrition and share activities with their children. For a Halloween parade, students even dressed up as healthy fruits and vegetables! They also have a relationship with the local YMCA which runs the CATCH Kids Extra Program after school.

LoBianco recalls the concern that classroom teachers had about having yet another unit to teach. But they were relieved to find that many of the simple concepts of the CATCH program could be infused into their current lesson plans. "The program is about a belief in the health of children. I have seen it work and become a successful part of a school-wide program. CATCH is a success at Jefferson because the stakeholders are committed to the idea that health-literate and physically-educated children learn better. It's an idea that needs to 'CATCH' on."

Brian Osborne, Superintendent of Schools for the South Orange-Maple School District agrees. "Health and well-being are preconditions for high-quality learning. The CATCH program's fun, student-centered approach teaches children how to make great choices for an active, healthy lifestyle. In South Orange-Maplewood, we pay attention to the mind-body connection as part of our mission to ensure strong academic performance for every student, and the CATCH program has helped us make that connection come alive for our students," said Osborne.

**If you are interested in learning more about CATCH, please visit [www.CATCHinfo.org](http://www.CATCHinfo.org) or contact Kathy Chichester at 800-793-7900, x 7518.**

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CATCH® (Coordinated Approach To Child Health) is an evidence-based, coordinated school health program designed to promote physical activity and healthy food choices and prevent tobacco use in elementary and middle school-aged children. By teaching children that eating healthy and being physically active can be fun, the CATCH Program has proven that healthy habits established in childhood can produce positive and lasting health behavior changes. For more information visit [www.CATCHinfo.org](http://www.CATCHinfo.org).

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