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## **Students Take Charge of Their Health**

*Student-led School Health Movement Builds National Momentum*

Chicago (June 22, 2010) – Enthusiastic teenagers are the latest group tackling the obesity epidemic, and their student-led school health movement is spreading rapidly throughout the nation.

Gaining momentum is “Students Taking Charge”, a national youth advocacy program that enabled 60,000 teens to eat healthier and be more active at school in 2009, and promises to expand significantly next school year as more schools take advantage of the free program and materials available at [www.StudentsTakingCharge.org](http://www.StudentsTakingCharge.org).

“Some students complain that their school doesn’t offer good food, but they don’t do anything about it,” says Jazemine Noel, a junior at Olney West High School in Philadelphia, who is active with Students Take Charge at her school. “Student leadership is a big responsibility. You have to be willing to step up to the plate to make a program work. But the results are worth it.”

Noel helped start a cooking club that offers weekly fruit and vegetable tastings to students, and then recommends these foods to the cafeteria. Noel reports that more students are eating lunch now that they influence the school menu, and they are eating healthier items such as salads and fruit. She also thinks the program has increased her confidence interacting with school officials.

“Each student had to solicit support from a school stakeholder, such as the principal or cafeteria manager, which can be intimidating,” says Margo Owen, CSN, Olney West High School’s school nurse and cooking club sponsor. “The advocacy suggestions provided in the Students Taking Charge materials empowered the students to be more confident and assertive, and ultimately resulted in these stakeholders’ support to get the program off the ground quickly.”

Students Taking Charge is available nationwide to all high schools. Some schools have found additional support from local partners. For example, 10 urban Philadelphia high schools implemented Students Taking Charge initiatives – including Olney West’s Cooking Club – thanks to funding from glacéau smartwater through the Entertainment Industry Foundation. Up to 50 additional Philadelphia high schools will participate next school year, supported by stimulus funds from Communities Putting Prevention to Work, an initiative of the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. Students Taking Charge will rollout in Kentucky through county health departments, with funding from the state’s Preventive Health Services Block Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In North Carolina, “Be Active North Carolina” will support statewide expansion of the program.

“Working with local organizations optimizes and extends resources and expertise, and ensures that Students Taking Charge meets local needs,” says Rob Bisceglie, executive director of Action for

Healthy Kids. “It also means more students can benefit from Students Taking Charge.” Action for Healthy Kids sees local partnerships as a model for successful partner engagement in other states.

Grants and partnerships have allowed Action for Healthy Kids to provide expertise and program assistance directly to high schools in 14 states, including major cities such as New York City, Washington D.C, Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, Seattle and Los Angeles.

“Students Taking Charge heralds a new era in how schools become healthier places and kids learn to be healthier. Teenagers are taking matters into their own hands to improve the nutrition and physical activity policies and practices of their schools, and at the same time, are helping themselves and their friends be healthier,” says Bisceglie.

### ***How Students Taking Charge Works***

Students Taking Charge provides a framework for students to help their schools become healthier places. There are free, online surveys to evaluate current school health practices; action plans; project templates; and best practices that work. Schools can customize Students Taking Charge to meet their unique needs with easy-to-use templates for projects such as a walk or bike to school program, local food initiative, healthy school market, or a non-competitive physical activity program that includes hiking, yoga, martial arts and dance. Students can share their stories and photos online, through a Flickr feed and interactive map.

Action for Healthy Kids has worked directly with students in high schools in California, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Washington, D.C.

### *About Action for Healthy Kids*

[Action for Healthy Kids](#)<sup>®</sup> is the nation’s leading nonprofit and volunteer network fighting childhood obesity and undernourishment by helping schools become healthier places and our kids learn to eat right, be active every day and be ready to learn. A collaboration of more than 67 organizations, corporations and government agencies supports grassroots efforts by thousands of volunteers nationwide. In 2009 Action for Healthy Kids reached nearly 4 million students in 8,000 schools. More information is available on [Facebook](#) and on [Twitter](#).

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