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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Alberta Centre for Active Living agrees that active kids are fit to learn**

**The Alberta Centre for Active Living acknowledges the 2009 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth**

EDMONTON (ALBERTA) JUNE 2, 2009 – The Alberta Centre for Active Living applauds the 2009 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, released today by Active Healthy Kids Canada and its strategic partners, ParticipACTION and the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Research Institute – Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (HALO).

According to the Report Card, children who are physically active perform better in school than those who are not active. Interestingly, academic performance improves even when academic learning time is reduced to allow time for physical activity.

“The Report Card confirms that physical activity helps kids to develop not just healthy bodies, but also healthy minds. Healthy students are better able to learn, so it is very important that schools ensure that our kids are physically active on a daily basis,” says Judith Down, director of the Alberta Centre for Active Living.

In Alberta, students are encouraged to develop positive daily physical activity habits through the Daily Physical Activity Initiative. School authorities are required by Alberta Education to ensure that kids in Grades 1 to 9 are physically active for a minimum of 30 minutes daily.

Another important Alberta program is [Ever Active Schools](#), which fosters social and physical environments that encourage students, teachers and parents to lead healthy, active lifestyles in their school communities.

“Schools and parents who replace children’s physical activity time with academic study to improve their academic performance should think again,” says Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chief Scientific Officer, Active Healthy Kids Canada, and director at CHEO-HALO. “Time spent getting active in school, on the playground or in a park can improve learning in the classroom.”

The Report Card notes that by improving memory, concentration and attention span, physical activity positively impacts children's achievement in math, reading, grades, perceptual skill and overall academic readiness. Physical activity has also been shown to increase a child's self-confidence, self-esteem, self-image and connection to school.

Ontario children who participated in a comprehensive school health initiative that included physical activity as a key element showed a 36 per cent increase in reading and a 24 per cent increase in math scores over a two-year period.\* Similar findings are mirrored in various international, national and regional studies.

Disturbingly, despite the academic and health benefits of physical activity, for the third consecutive year, the 2009 Report Card assigned an F for Physical Activity Levels. Only 13 per cent of Canadian children and youth are meeting the minimum recommendation of 90 minutes of physical activity a day.

"The health benefits of physical activity are understood," says Michelle Brownrigg, Chief Executive Officer, Active Healthy Kids Canada (Toronto). "Now, with growing evidence that physical activity enhances academic performance, there's another important reason to get Canadian children to turn off the screens and get moving. Governments, schools, communities and parents need to work together to ensure Canada's youth get the physical activity they desperately need."

Again this year, the Report Card assigned an F for Screen Time, as 90 per cent of Canadian children and youth are spending far too much time in front of television, computer and video screens. Although the rise in popularity of active video games means screen time is no longer a completely sedentary activity, active gaming is not a replacement for physical activity. It does not require the same levels of energy expenditure, nor does it offer the same opportunities for outdoor play or social interaction.

"There are plenty of simple ways to add more movement into our children's lives," says Kelly Murumets, President and CEO, ParticipACTION. "Make physical activity a part of your family routine by encouraging free play, walking or biking to school and trading in the screen time for active time."

Physical activity builds strong, smart kids. Strong, smart kids are the foundation of a strong, smart society that we need in tough times—and will lead us to better times. This year's Report Card reveals that we have a toe-hold on change and that Canada is slowly moving in the right direction. However, increased and continued commitment is required at all levels of government, communities, schools and within families to ensure this movement continues, and positive and measurable change is achieved.

**Among the 19 grades assigned in the Report Card, key findings include:**

- "D" for Usage of Facilities, Programs, Parks and Playgrounds
- "B" for School Infrastructure and Equipment
- "C" for Physical Education in Schools
- "B+" for Community Programming
- "C+" for Provincial Government Strategies and Investment
- "D" for Municipal Policies and Regulations

The Alberta Centre for Active Living is a non-profit organization that provides physical activity research and education for people who promote physical activity in their work. The centre is affiliated with the University of Alberta and is supported by the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation.

\* Guertin, M. (2007). An examination of the effect of a comprehensive school health model on academic achievement: The effect of living school on EQAO test scores. Toronto: University of Toronto.

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