



news release

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Wellmark Foundation Grant to Support Childhood Obesity Prevention Program in Des Moines Middle School

(DES MOINES, IOWA) – Des Moines Public Schools will use a \$46,991 grant from The Wellmark Foundation to prevent childhood obesity by creating a fitness arcade at Merrill Middle School.

The *Merrill Middle School Fitness Arcade* will provide staffing resources and equipment to complete a fitness arcade designed to increase physical activity of students, says Blake Hammond, science teacher at Merrill Middle School. The arcade will be available for students to use in physical education and other classes, during recess and after school. In addition, weekly family nights with targeted outreach to at-risk children and families will be held throughout the year.

“The fitness arcade will provide exergaming opportunities for children in a safe, accessible and fun environment,” says Hammond. “The arcade will use technology-driven games that require students to be physically active in order to play. This form of exercise incorporates the fun aspect of video games with a physical activity component.” Arcade equipment will include Nintendo Wii systems, dance and skateboard systems, recumbent bikes and wall-mounted televisions. The equipment will include heart rate monitoring capabilities to track students’ health progress.

According to Hammond, more than 40 percent of Merrill Middle School’s students are either overweight or at risk for overweight. Although the arcade will be available to all students, it will target students that currently do not participate in physical education class activities, those in high risk ethnic groups, and students not meeting fitness goals during regular physical education classes. The project will also incorporate nutrition information through the school nurse and a resource center located in the arcade, says Hammond.

Collaborating organizations include Des Moines University, Blank Children’s Hospital and Mercy School of Nursing. For more information about *Merrill Middle School Fitness Arcade*, contact Blake Hammond at blake.hammond@dmps.k12.ia.us or 515-242-8448.

The Wellmark Foundation has provided nearly \$14.7 million to fund 406 health-related grants in Iowa and South Dakota since 1997, including \$1,739,233 this cycle. “The Wellmark Foundation collaborates with non-profit and governmental organizations in Iowa and South Dakota to positively impact the health outcomes of individuals and communities in our states,” says Matthew McGarvey, director of The Wellmark Foundation. “We are happy to fund this unique grant that will support childhood obesity prevention and see an exergaming project in action,” says McGarvey.

The Wellmark Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation created by Wellmark, Inc., doing business as Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa. Due to the Foundation’s recent significant support toward disaster relief efforts, the timeline for the second 2008 community responsive grant cycle has been modified. Letters of Interest (LOIs) are now due on September 23, 2008. Learn more about this funding opportunity during a grant applicant teleconference on July 21, 2008. For teleconference and LOI details, visit the Foundation’s Web site at www.wellmark.com/foundation. Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield and The Wellmark Foundation are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.