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## **Cathedral School partners with Heartland Foundation and Project Fit America to get kids physically fit**

### **St. Joseph school honored as one of the nation's first to pilot the indoor only program**

St. Joseph, Mo. (February 23, 2016) – Cathedral School and Heartland Foundation will officially launch their honored role as a pilot and model school for Project Fit America's [PFA] first indoor only fitness program. The Opening Day Kick Off and Fitness Celebration will be held on Monday, February 29, 2016, at 2:15 p.m. at Cathedral School, 518 N. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, St. Joseph, Mo. The public is invited to join the students, teachers, supporters and local dignitaries for the event.

PFA is working to expand service to schools that are landlocked, and will spend the next two to three years developing the program here in St. Joseph. The program will eventually roll out to other landlocked schools across the nation.

Mary Burgess, principal at Cathedral School, has been a tireless champion for bringing this program to her school by sharing the challenges of limited outdoor space with PFA. "We are excited to be chosen to receive this grant award for the PFA pilot indoor program. We are looking forward to our partnership with Heartland Foundation and PFA, and to the health benefits this will bring to all of our students," Burgess said.

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The grant for this new program includes indoor fitness equipment and dynamic curriculum with games, activities and challenges for kids using the equipment. It is much more than basic physical education activities. The program also teaches character development, sportsmanship, teamwork and leadership skills. The academic emphasis is to create “physically educated” children and to empower them to take personal responsibility of their health with enthusiasm. Support to the school for two years with on-site training with the PE Teacher Lindee Corkins is also provided.

“Research shows that not only is physical education important for a child’s physical development, but it also helps kids read and learn math. Active kids are better learners. Quality physical fitness has a direct impact on a child’s health and their academic success,” said Stacey Cook, executive director of Project Fit America. “We are extremely proud of Heartland Foundation for their commitment to bring this program to the community and for their dedication to improving the health and well-being of youth for decades.”

Since 1999, Heartland Foundation has provided grants to 58 schools for the traditional PFA program that includes state-of-the-art outdoor fitness station equipment and curriculum. Participating schools report increased motivation, participation and physical improvements in their students, along with parents and faculty becoming more involved in choosing fitness activities over sedentary lifestyle habits.

“The partnership between our organizations is a long-standing example of how working together we can empower our region’s youth to reach their maximum potential,” stated Judith K. Sabbert, president of Heartland Foundation.

Serving as a catalyst, convener, innovator, and connector, Heartland Foundation is a public charity dedicated to championing education and empowering people to build healthy and thriving communities. Founded in 1982 and leading the region’s Healthy Communities movement since 1994.

## **ABOUT PROJECT FIT AMERICA [PFA]**

PFA is a national nonprofit organization that creates sustainable and innovative broad based fitness programs in schools. PFA programming includes state-of-the-art outdoor fitness equipment specifically designed to address the deficit areas where children fail fitness tests; indoor fitness equipment; a dynamic curriculum with games activities and challenges; on-site teacher training and in-class instruction on subjects such as smoking intervention, nutrition and understanding your body. PFA is in its 25<sup>th</sup> year of working with schools in nearly 900 schools in over 300 cities in 46 states.

## **FAST FACTS ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY IN THE UNITED STATES**

Source: U.S. Surgeon General

Since 1980, the U.S. Surgeon General reports the rates of childhood obesity have tripled. Government estimates say there are 6 million American children who are now overweight and an additional 5 million who are on the threshold of becoming overweight.

Doctors are seeing more children with what we typically consider adult diseases such as gallbladder disease, sleep apnea and Type 2 diabetes.

Health experts indicate this may be the first generation not expected to outlive their parents due to the health problems associated with obesity.

## **FAST FACTS ON THE BENEFITS OF PHYSICALLY ACTIVE CHILDREN**

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness.

**Better thinking skills.** Studies show that people who exercise more are sharper mentally. The effects may be almost immediate. One study found that kids scored higher on math and reading comprehension tests after exercising for 20 minutes.

**More confidence.** Studies have found that kids who are physically active are more confident. In turn, that confidence may improve their academic performance, too. Active kids tend to get better grades. Though there could be a lot of reasons for that, including brain benefits, part of it may be better self-confidence.

**Better moods.** Many studies have found that kids who exercise feel happier. Physical activity releases brain chemicals that are natural stress fighters. Just about any physical activity seems to help. Physically active kids are better at managing their moods and have fewer mood swings, too.

**Sounder sleep.** Kids who exercise regularly fall asleep faster than other kids. They also stay asleep longer; the more vigorous the activity, the bigger the sleep benefit. Getting enough sleep lifts moods, improves judgment, and boosts memory.