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**PROGRESS SHOWN ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY**

*Greater Portland's Let's Go! identifies positive changes in children's health behaviors.*

(Portland, ME – 1/5/09)---New local research shows that a healthy lifestyle initiative in Greater Portland, Let's Go!, is making strides in reducing childhood obesity rates. The program is reporting changes in behaviors and an increase in awareness of obesity issues and prevention messages.

Tory Rogers, Medical Director for Let's Go! said, " We are pleased to discover that children and families appear to be making healthier choices and meeting healthy behavior guidelines."

Let's Go! is a unique partnership of Maine's leading health, business and community-based organizations. In response to alarming data that 36% of kindergartners, 30% of middle school children, and 27% of high school children were reported to be overweight or at-risk for being overweight, business leaders in the community came together to form Let's Go! with the mission to address childhood obesity.

The initiative adopted the easy-to-remember campaign message, 5-2-1-0, which encourages people to aim for: 5 or more servings of fruits & vegetables, 2 hours or less of recreational screen time, 1 hour or more of physical activity and 0 sugary drinks, drink more water and low-fat milk, daily. Research results just released also indicated that awareness of the 5-2-1-0 message has increased from 14 percent in 2007 to 43 percent in 2009. It's been reported by parents that their children have healthier behaviors: [a](#)

**jump of 27.3% percent** in the number of children meeting at least 3 out of the 4 recommended behaviors of the 5-2-1-0 model, (from 22 percent in 2007 to in 28 percent in 2009.) Awareness of the Let's Go! Initiative has also increased from 9 percent in 2007 to 45% in 2009.

Other findings from the research are equally encouraging, parents responded;

- 99% agree they should play a role in assuring a healthy lifestyle for their children.
- 88% agree that childhood obesity is one of the most urgent public health issues.
- 75% report support formal school policies as to the sale of junk food.
- 75% support increases in physical education during the school day.
- 59% agree that schools must take a much greater role in assuring children lead a healthy lifestyles.

Rogers noted that Greater Portland childhood obesity rates are expected to be released in 2010. "It will be interesting to note how awareness and behavior changes correlate to obesity rates in Maine."

Let's Go! has reached thousands of people every day in Greater Portland, including 20,000 students in 50 schools; 1500 children in 15 child care sites; thousands of youth in 6 after school recreation centers; over one hundred childcare providers through statewide training and outreach; 128 healthcare providers and residents that are members of MMC-PHO; and 11,600 employees in 6 of Greater Portland's largest employers.

5-2-1-0 Goes to School is a statewide program created by the Kids Co-op in the Barbara Bush Children's Hospital at Maine Medical Center and has been utilized as the Let's Go! school intervention in Greater Portland. This program has been implemented in over 175 additional schools outside of the Let's Go! Greater Portland region. To date, there are other areas in Maine that have either self identified as a new Let's Go! site or are exploring the possibility.

Let's Go! has been highlighted by the National CDC both in 2007 and in 2009 at the Weight of the Nation Conference; and again this December, when it was identified as a model of promising partnerships working in childhood obesity and invited to attend the National Convergence Conference in California. The tools and resources created by Let's Go! to promote the 5-2-1-0 message are now being used to educate parents across the state and nationally.

Emily Rines, Project Director of Lets Go! also stated that: "We're very encouraged by the changes we're seeing; this is proof of the reach and potential of Let's Go!. We have been successful in part because of our partnerships and collaborations with other local and state programs working to impact Childhood obesity. We have also been successful because we have been able to be innovative in our response to this important public health issue. In addition we have had incredible support from our seven founding partners and platinum supporters, without whom we would not have been able to achieve so much in such a short amount of time. The changes are exciting, but there is still more work to do."<sup>3</sup>

Let's Go!'s Founding Partners are Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Maine, Hannaford Bros. Co., MaineHealth, Maine Medical Center, TD Bank, Unum and United Way of Greater Portland. Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation is a Platinum Supporter of Let's Go!, as a part of their Growing Up Healthy Initiative. Let's Go! has partnered closely with The Kids CO-OP of The Barbara Bush Children's Hospital at Maine Medical Center to implement Let's Go and the 5-2-1-0 message in the following settings: schools, child care, after school and healthcare.

**For further information about Let's Go!, please visit [www.letsgo.org](http://www.letsgo.org)**