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Let's Go! Area Schools Making Strides in Student Wellness

Portland, Maine, December 16 –With budget cuts and test scores at the top of the list of concerns for public schools, issues of student wellness often fall to the bottom. This is not the case for 44 local schools that have realized that health and wellness are important issues that should not be on the back burner. With 36% of Maine kindergartners overweight or obese, the need for integrating nutrition and physical activity into the school day is clear.

5-2-1-0 Goes to School, the school component of Let's Go!, (the community-wide physical activity and nutrition initiative established by seven area companies), offers tools, expertise, and financial support to motivate teachers, school administrators, school nutrition programs, and parents to help create healthier school environments that encourage healthy eating and physical activity.

The 5-2-1-0 Goes to School framework is based on the following message: 5- Eat at least 5 fruits and vegetables a day, 2- Limit TV and computer use (not related to school) to two hours or less a day, 1- Get one hour or more of physical activity every day and 0- Drink less sugar and try water and low fat milk instead of soda and drinks with lots of sugar.

Through use of this framework, schools have been supported in making significant changes to their schools. Most recently, two schools have removed sugary juice filled vending machines and replaced the juice with water. Another school reduced chocolate milk consumption by 17%, while increasing overall milk consumption. Several other schools are creating walking paths for student and community use.

Schools making such improvements are always in need of parental and community support. Be sure to check in with your child's school on a regular basis to see what is happening around wellness. Community members are also often welcomed into schools. Check in with local schools to see how you can contribute.

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5-2-1-0 is a message for every season. As the cold sets in and the holidays approach, there are a few quick and easy tips that can encourage everyone to stay focused on healthy eating and physical activity.

- ★ School Parties – Teachers and parents can work together to ensure that healthy options are included in the party menu. Consider planning a party menu that contains items from each food group on the Food Pyramid.
- ★ Staying Active – Don't fear the snow and cold! Bundle up and take a family outing to the local sledding hill, or have a snowman making competition. Be sure to participate in Let's Go! and healthy Portland's Winterfit, a component of Portland WinterRush, Maine's Coolest Outdoor Festival coming in February 2009.
- ★ School Snow Days - While it can be tempting to curl up in front of the TV on snow days, don't forget to limit your screen time to two hours or less a day. Pull out the craft box and cut out snowflakes to decorate the windows or go outside and play in the new snow.

Let's Go! promotes healthy lifestyle choices for children, youth, and families in 12 Greater Portland communities by focusing on physical activity and healthy eating. The multi-year project is being funded by founding partners Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation, TD Banknorth, Hannaford, MaineHealth, Maine Medical Center, Unum, and United Way of Greater Portland. Let's Go! was created in direct response to a doubling in the rate of obesity in Maine's children over the past three decades.

For more information on Let's Go! contact United Way of Greater Portland at 874-1000 or visit www.letsgo.org.

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