

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund Awards Fit Community and A+ Fit School Designations and Grants to Tackle Obesity

RALEIGH, NC – The North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) announced the award of eight Fit Community designations and seven A+ Fit School designations to North Carolina municipalities, nonprofit organizations and schools. These designations recognize the work that has been done to promote physical activity, healthy eating and tobacco-free lifestyles through programs, policies and environmental changes at the school and community levels. In addition, a total of \$435,000 in grant funding was awarded to selected towns, counties and schools with demonstrated capacity to implement projects that promote healthful changes.

“Community and school environments have a tremendous influence on individual health behaviors,” said Dr. Chuck Willson, HWTF chair. “These designees and grantees are clearly committed to fostering healthful changes in their communities and schools, and this is vital to the success of obesity prevention efforts and to improving the health of our population.”

Obesity has emerged as a major threat to children and adults across the United States and is particularly prevalent here in North Carolina. According to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 61% of North Carolina adults are overweight or obese, with obesity-related expenses adding up to more than \$2.1 billion annually. HWTF’s Fit Community and A+ Fit School programs support local efforts to address this growing problem.

Founded in 2005, the Fit Community program selects designees on an annual basis that have met specific criteria to be recognized as a Fit Community. This year, eight designees were selected by the HWTF Commission in recognition of their success in promoting healthier lifestyles among their residents. The Town of Cary and Mecklenburg County are the first applicants ever to achieve the Gold level Fit Community designation. The City of Kings Mountain, the City of Raleigh, and the City of Winston-Salem were awarded the Silver level Fit Community designation. Buncombe County, Pitt County and the Town of Pittsboro all received the Bronze level designation.

The HWTF Commission also provides grant funding and technical assistance to North Carolina communities to support health and wellness. HWTF awarded six Fit Community grants to: the City of Asheboro; the City of Belmont; Buncombe County Parks, Greenways and Recreation Services; the Chatham County Public Health Department; Jackson County Parks and Recreation Department; and the City of Lenoir. HWTF works with Active Living By Design, which is part of the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health, to provide tailored technical assistance to each community.

The Fit Community grantees will implement such projects as constructing walking trails, starting community gardens, supporting employee wellness programs, and enhancing physical activity resources in and around schools. All North Carolina municipalities and nonprofits were eligible to apply for the Fit Community grants and receive up to \$60,000 in grant funding over a period of two years. HWTF has awarded \$2.5 million as part of its Fit Community grant program over the past five years.

Last year, HWTF expanded its “Fit” designations program to include an A+ Fit School designation recognizing North Carolina schools for the work they are doing in promoting health among students, teachers, staff and administrators. A+ Fit School designations were awarded this month by the HWTF Commission to: Ayden Middle School in Ayden, Contentnea-Savannah Elementary School in Kinston, Erwin Montessori School in Greensboro, The Learning Center Charter School in Murphy, North Rowan Elementary School in Spencer, Thomasville Primary School in Thomasville, and Underwood Magnet Elementary School in Raleigh. Each designated school will receive a plaque, a school banner, and a \$1,000 discretionary stipend.

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The recipients for the A+ Fit School grant awards include: Archdale Elementary School in Archdale, Brawley Middle School in Scotland Neck, Burnsville Elementary School in Burnsville, The Learning Center Charter School in Murphy, Mattamuskeet Middle School in Swan Quarter, North Rowan Elementary School in Spencer, Overhills Elementary School in Spring Lake, Scurlock Elementary School in Raeford, and Sedge Garden Elementary School in Kernersville.

All North Carolina schools were eligible to apply for the A+ Fit School grants and receive up to \$7,500 in grant funding over a period of one year. In addition to the grant funding provided by HWTF, each school receives technical assistance from East Carolina University's Department of Health Education and Promotion.

For more information about HWTF's obesity prevention programs, visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$199 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$116 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

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