

NEWS RELEASE

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'Smart Bodies' Coming To Schools Across Louisiana This Year

Students across Louisiana will have a chance to increase their "smarts" about nutrition, fitness and health this year, thanks to an innovative educational effort from the LSU AgCenter and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana Foundation.

Known as Smart Bodies, the three-part interactive program will be brought to nearly 100 schools across the state beginning this fall.

"We think Smart Bodies can make a real difference in combating childhood obesity by teaching elementary school students about nutrition, health and physical activity," said Denise Holston, who coordinates the statewide educational program for the LSU AgCenter. "In our pilot tests with the program last spring, we found that children definitely increased their physical activity as a result of being involved in Smart Bodies."

Other results seen in the initial tests with Smart Bodies showed that participating students increased their knowledge of nutrition and improved their attitudes toward eating fruits and vegetables.

The pilot tests were conducted in the spring of 2005 with approximately 1,800 students in East Baton Rouge Parish. This fall, thousands more students will benefit from the program as it spreads to 97 schools in 28 parishes across the state.

Smart Bodies was funded in large part by a five-year grant of \$1.8 million from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana Foundation. It represents a public-private partnership between Blue Cross and the LSU AgCenter, the research and outreach arm of the LSU System.

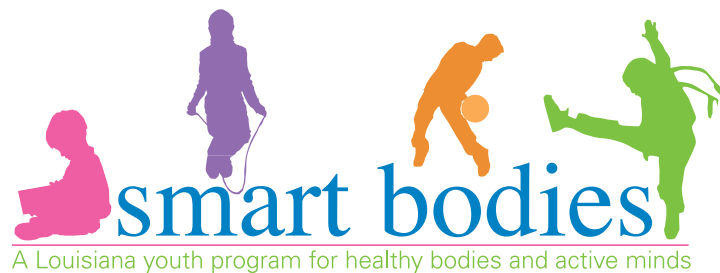
"This joint venture between Blue Cross and the LSU AgCenter is an outstanding example of the public-private partnerships we need in Louisiana to address public issues such as obesity and the rising cost of health care," said Gery Barry, president and chief executive officer of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana. "Our company is proud to be part of this partnership, and we look forward to expanding the reach of this entertaining and educational program and, even more important, the benefits it can have in improving people's lives here in Louisiana."

The Smart Bodies program integrates classroom activities with hands-on learning to teach children how to build strong bodies and develop active minds by focusing on healthful eating habits and physical exercise.



**BlueCross BlueShield
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Stressing that research shows health problems later in life may be reduced by combating obesity, representatives of the LSU AgCenter and Blue Cross said preventing childhood obesity is a critical goal.

“Almost one in three Louisiana school-aged children is overweight or obese,” said Barry. “This is a profound public health issue, and the Smart Bodies program will give educators the tools to teach Louisiana children healthy lifestyles now, so they can grow up to be healthy adults.”

The LSU AgCenter’s Holston says the Smart Bodies program is an excellent model for teaching children about good nutrition and exercise in a manner they can understand. She also pointed out that teachers and principals appreciate the program because it helps schools meet their goals for student health and wellness.

The three components of Smart Bodies are the Louisiana Body Walk, the OrganWise Guys and Take 10!

The Louisiana Body Walk is a 35-foot-by-45-foot walk-through exhibit representing the human body. Designed to be an at-school field trip, the interactive Body Walk and its 10 learning stations can accommodate about 400-450 students a day. It is designed to let students explore models of various organs such as the stomach, heart, lungs and brain and to learn about the effects of different foods on each organ.

The second component of the Smart Bodies program makes use of fun characters, the OrganWise Guys, to help young children understand physiology and healthy behaviors. These characters – Hardy Heart, Madame Muscle, Windy the Lungs, Peri Stolic the Intestines, Sir Rebrum the Brain, Peter Pancreas, Pepto the Stomach, the Kidney Brothers, Luigi Liver and Calci M. Bone – are used throughout the Body Walk, as well as in the program’s classroom curriculum.

Completing the three-pronged approach to education is the Take 10! series of classroom-based, grade-specific educational tools that encourage short bouts of physical activity integrated with academic lessons. Participating schools will receive curricular materials and training for each grade level from local LSU AgCenter extension agents. The curriculum was created by teachers for teachers and students, and the activity cards provided in it are linked to the academic expectations established by the Louisiana Department of Education.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana is underwriting the full Smart Bodies program for 50 schools over a five-year period. Qualifying schools are being identified by LSU AgCenter faculty members based on a number of factors related to the potential risk for childhood obesity.

Because Smart Bodies can reach up to 100 schools a year, additional funding is continually being sought to expand the program to more schools. In 2005, curricular materials were provided by the LSU AgCenter through its Family Nutrition Program to reach an additional 50 schools.

To learn more about Smart Bodies, contact Holston at (225) 578-4573 or dholston@agcenter.lsu.edu or visit www.smartbodies.org. To learn more about the sponsoring organizations, visit www.lsuagcenter.com or www.bcbsla.com.

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