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Contact: Carl Callison
304-347-7728
ccallison@msbcbs.com

Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield Offers \$150,000 in Grants Through its “Challenge for Healthier Schools”

Grants Awarded to Schools for Innovative Ideas to Address Student Wellness

CHARLESTON, WV – Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield has unveiled a program to improve the physical and nutritional status of elementary school students. Through the “Challenge for Healthier Schools” project, Mountain State will award three-year grants to elementary schools that submit proposals for innovative programs promoting increased physical activity and/or nutrition education. The “Challenge for Healthier Schools” project was developed in conjunction with the West Virginia Department of Education and was endorsed by the State Board of Education.

Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield is committed to helping improve the overall health status of West Virginians through public/private partnerships. The “Challenge for Healthier Schools” project provides an excellent opportunity to encourage a collaborative effort among teachers, students and parents to develop a complete approach to student wellness. A wide variety of initiatives are acceptable, ranging from appropriate school lunches or vending machine offerings to providing opportunities for all students to participate in physical activity in a non-competitive environment. “We strongly believe that the key to reversing the tide of obesity and heart disease in West Virginia is educating elementary school age children by teaching them proper nutrition and physical activity so they can carry those tools with them into adulthood,” said Gregory K. Smith, President and CEO of Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield.

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Selected school programs will receive cash grants in the amount of \$7,500 or \$15,000 over a three-year period. The initial year grants of \$2,500 or \$5,000 will be awarded in January 2004 to fund programs beginning September 1, 2004.

“ ‘Challenge for Healthier Schools’ is a great program that clearly fits one of our major goals,” said State Superintendent of Schools David Stewart. “We applaud Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield for its initiative and can only hope that others will follow suit.”

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, obesity in children has doubled over the past two decades. More than 13 percent of all children are seriously overweight and often develop severe medical problems early in their life. Type 2 diabetes, once associated with middle age and attributable in large part to poor eating habits and inactivity, is one example of a condition that is now becoming more prevalent in children.

“Medical evidence shows that 70 percent of today’s health care burden is related to lifestyle and therefore preventable. If we can get kids interested or more involved in exercise and nutrition, their quality of life will greatly improve,” says Smith.

To be eligible for a “Challenge” grant, the elementary school must submit a letter of intent by September 15, 2003. Completed applications must be submitted by October 15, 2003. After the initial year, schools that were awarded grants will be required to submit renewal applications by June 30th of each year, as well as documentation showing how funds were used and that progress was made in the students’ overall health and wellness.

The “Challenge for Healthier Schools” is one of several preventive health programs initiated by Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield. The company’s goal is to educate all West Virginians so that future disease and health problems associated with poor diet and lack of exercise can be alleviated by actions taken today. By offering a three-year grant program, more

children can be reached, marking a healthier start for many young West Virginians.

Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association. Mountain State provides or administers coverage to more than 400,000 West Virginians and has over 800 employees in Parkersburg, Charleston, Wheeling, Martinsburg, and Weirton.

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