

For Immediate Release

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Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield Awards over \$140,000 in Grants Through its “Challenge for Healthier Schools” Program

Successful Schools Submitted Innovative Ideas to Address Student Wellness

PARKERSBURG, WV (January 14, 2004) – As part of Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield’s ongoing work to address the problem of overweight and inactive children, the company is awarding over \$140,000 in grants through its “Challenge for Healthier Schools.” The challenge to schools was to submit an innovative program idea dealing with increased physical activity and/or nutrition education. Nineteen West Virginia Elementary Schools will receive a cash grant to be used to implement the program at the beginning of the 2004-05 school year.

The “Challenge for Healthier Schools” represents a collaborative effort among teachers, students and parents to come up with a complete approach to student wellness. A wide variety of proposals were submitted providing opportunities for students to participate in physical activity in a non-competitive environment.

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,” said Gregory K. Smith, President and CEO of Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield.

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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 was developed in conjunction with the West Virginia Department of Education and was endorsed by the State Board of Education. Thirteen cash grants totaling \$142,500 will be awarded over a three-year period.

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 reduced 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 and 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. To learn more about Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield, please visit www.msbcbs.com.

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