

## First Lady Otter, Supt. Luna team up to introduce school fitness program

By Dustin Hurst  
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*South Jr. High students exercises to gain over 1,200 steps*

With gym students of South Junior High in Boise looking on as they spoke Tuesday, First Lady Lori Otter and Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna introduced a pilot fitness program they hope will increase physical activity and accountability in schools.

The pilot program will provide schools, three in Boise and one in Nampa, with pedometers for gym classes. Students will use the pedometers to track the amount of steps they take during gym class and will give them a way to accurately measure their progress in class. Students will not be allowed to take the pedometers home overnight or during the summer months.

The money for the initiative, \$55,000, was provided by Virgin Health. In January 2009, Virgin challenged 15 governors and their executive teams to log the as many steps as they could in a two-week period. Gov. Butch Otter and First Lady Otter and their team [won the competition](#) with 226,240 steps, or 113 miles, logged during the two weeks period of the competition. That amount narrowly beat out Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin's team and Gov. Rick Perry's team from Texas.

During his speech to members of the press and school children, Luna said that students learn better when healthy, adding Idaho needs to increase the focus put on physical education. Luna also reported the findings of the *Idaho Schools Body Mass Index (BMI) Assessment for 2008-2009* study, which measured the BMI of 5,242 students from grades 1-11. Compared to the national average of 33.5 percent of students being obese, Idaho's average of 30.5 percent is good, but still needs work said Luna.

Other study findings:

- Results for overweight or obese student varied by grade, ranging from 24.3 percent of first graders to 33 percent of seventh graders.
- Boys, at 16.3 percent, were more likely to be obese than girls, at 11.1 percent.
- Schools that had the highest rates of obesity also had the highest rates of students with low socioeconomic status.

Luna said the Idaho Department of Education is working hard to deal with the obesity issue. The department is working with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and other organizations to coordinate efforts to bring more relevancy to physical fitness and health education programs in Idaho. Luna also touted the Idaho State Board of Education's fall 2009 revision of school meal program, which will reduce fat and calorie intake and increase availability of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

First Lady Otter, a former physical education teacher, told students that fitness is important to them and the community at large and that physical education is an integral part of every child's education experience. "Physical fitness and nutrition go hand in hand with providing you with the best future Idaho can possibly give you," said Otter. "My philosophy is to...educate the whole child."

Otter said fitness programs help students develop the tools to discipline themselves and prepare themselves for the time when they leave home and don't have parents coordinating their lives for them.

Of the pilot project, Otter said "its primary object is to get kids moving so we can have a healthier United States."

In an interview with *IdahoReporter.com* following the announcement, Luna said that physical fitness efforts by students need to increase while in school, as well as at home on nights and weekends. Luna also said the No. 1 enemy of healthy kids is technology.

"I'm a huge fan of technology...but it can make us sedentary," said Luna. "There is amount of time that can and should be spent with the technology, but at some point you have to wean yourself from that."

Luna called on parents to take the lead in fitness activities and turn off the television and take kids outside to play. He said that as more parents get involved with technology, kids will follow suit, which can have a negative impact on a child's health.

"Even if it's just going for a long walk, it's important," Luna said. "Healthy parents start with parents...because that's who our children look."

When asked if Idaho schools have ever considered providing students with financial incentives for physical fitness as [other schools have done](#) with school work and as was demonstrated by Governor and First Lady Otter, Luna said he hasn't heard any conversations regarding the idea.