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**Childhood obesity plateaus in Anchorage, but excessive weight remains a problem**

*Department of Health and Social Services, Anchorage School District share new data*

(Anchorage, AK) — Alaska’s Chief Medical Officer will announce to the Anchorage School Board Monday that new height and weight measurements reveal that the percentage of overweight and obese youth attending school in the Anchorage School District has leveled off since 2003.

“While this is certainly good news and gives us reason to be hopeful, Alaska’s children still face a significant problem with weight,” said Dr. Jay Butler, Chief Medical Officer with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. “Although the trend has stabilized, more than one out of every three students in the Anchorage School District is overweight or obese and that remains a challenge.”

Excessive weight in children is linked with high blood pressure, high cholesterol and type 2 diabetes, Butler said. Studies show that overweight kids are at risk of growing up to be overweight adults who face poor health and early deaths from serious, weight-related health problems. In addition, treatment of diseases caused by obesity has contributed to the increasing cost of health care. For example, Medicaid expenditures in Alaska for type 2 diabetes in children have doubled during the past four years.

The Anchorage School District, the largest school district in the state, and the Alaska Division of Public Health have collaborated during the past decade to gather and study children’s health records to monitor weight trends among Alaska’s youngest residents. Trained district staff members routinely collect the heights and weights of students in preschool through grade 12. Between the 1998-99 and 2007-08 school years, the division was able to study numbers from 46,658 students. By the end of that 10-year period, the measurements showed Anchorage children’s weights fell into the following categories:

- About 37 percent of students were overweight (between the 85<sup>th</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles weight for height);
- 20 percent of middle-school and high-school students were obese (greater than or equal to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile weight for height)

The analysis revealed other findings:

- Weight problems start before children enter school. About one out of every three Anchorage students younger than age 6 is overweight or obese.
- The prevalence of being overweight or obese has been higher among Anchorage boys than girls.

- Overall, overweight children tended to remain overweight years later. The analysis showed that although some students move between weight categories over time, a majority had the same weight classification in 2007-08 as they did in 1998-99. Nearly one out of four students who were normal weight in 1998-99 moved into the overweight or obese category 10 years later.

While state health officials are encouraged by the leveling off of obesity figures among Anchorage students, they say more work is needed to reverse the trend of childhood obesity. Such work includes a comprehensive, long-term obesity prevention program that involves families, communities, worksites, health-care professionals, government, industry, media and schools. Schools have already started to make changes. In 2006, the Anchorage School District banned the sale of soda and junk food in vending machines and school stores. The district also increased the amount of health education instruction and physical education time in elementary schools.

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