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Action for Healthy Kids Calls for Continued Improvements for Children Before U.S. Senate Committee

*Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher provides recommendations
to help children eat well, play more and be ready to learn*

Atlanta, GA (May 15, 2009) – Action for Healthy Kid is calling on the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry to enact changes that will improve the nutrition and physical fitness of our children and bring the nation a step closer to reducing the future societal burden of obesity and the economic and racial disparities that accompany it.

Testifying for Action for Healthy Kids, David Satcher, MD, PhD, former U.S. Surgeon General and founding chair and board member of Action for Healthy Kids, encouraged the Committee to look at children's health in the broader contexts of educational performance and our nation's broken healthcare system. He highlighted the important role schools can play and the strong relationship between nutrition, physical activity and learning.

"There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that children who eat poorly or who engage in too little physical activity do not perform as well as they could academically," said Dr. Satcher, now director of the Satcher Health Leadership Institute at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia. "This has serious consequences not only for our children, but our schools, communities and society."

He applauded the use of school wellness policies in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 as a good first step, but noted that additional action now must be taken to bridge the gap between policy and actual implementation and monitoring of these plans.

"We need more nutrient rich foods in our children's diets. Our children need to play and be more active," he said. "More than 30 percent of our children are overweight or obese, with low-income and minority children remaining disproportionately affected. This continues to be an epidemic, and it should be unacceptable to all of us."

Dr. Satcher offered the Committee three specific recommendations:

- **Provide incentives for schools that make incremental changes in creating an environment that promotes healthy eating and increased physical activity among students.** "Similar incentives are effective in the adult workplace and can be effective in schools given their funding limitations," Dr. Satcher said. He noted that improvements worthy of incentives might include better access to after-school programs, in-class breakfast availability, percentage increases in physical education time or better monitoring and accountability for existing wellness policies.
- **Put child nutrition and fitness in the broader context of the challenges our nation faces in addressing health care and its systems.** "The costs of obesity to our health system, not to

mention unnecessary pain and suffering, are astounding,” Dr. Satcher explained. “A healthcare model that targets the major determinants of this obesity epidemic, including the social and behavioral determinants is needed.”

- **Do a better job of developing policies that recognize the relationship between nutrition, physical activity and readiness to learn.** The Action for Healthy Kids’ report *The Learning Connection*, which documents this link was submitted for the Committee’s consideration. Dr. Satcher noted that schools that have incorporated nutrition, physical education and physical activity goals into continuous school improvement plans have experienced significant academic improvements.

“Responsibility for improvements fall on us all,” said Dr. Satcher. “Anything that we can do to bring about better coordination – whether between federal and state policy makers, between nutritionists and educators, or among parents, administrators and students themselves – will yield positive results in the long term.”

About Action for Healthy Kids

Action for Healthy Kids[®] is a national nonprofit organization that addresses the epidemic of overweight, undernourished and sedentary youth by focusing on improving nutrition and physical activity policies and practices in schools. This grassroots public-private partnership of 65 organizations and government agencies supports the efforts of Teams comprised of more than 11,000 volunteers in all states and the District of Columbia. Action for Healthy Kids was founded in 2002 by former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, in response to the *Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, which identified the school environment as one of five key sites of change. To learn more, visit www.ActionForHealthyKids.org.

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