



# State of California

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Dear Principal:

In my new role as Secretary of Education for the State of California, I am struck by the many opportunities that exist, even in these challenging economic times, to help promote student achievement. One proven way of improving academic performance is to encourage young people to be physically active. That is why I am writing you to ask your school to participate in this year's Governor's Challenge Competition - a FREE contest among K-12 schools that challenges California students, parents and teachers to get more active, healthy and fit.

### **Why is physical activity important to your students' development?**

There is an abundance of research tying physical fitness and sports to academic success, including Dr. John Ratey's 2007 book *Spark*, in which he writes, "[I] cannot underestimate how important regular exercise is in improving the function and performance of the brain." I would also like to refer you to a report released just last month called *Learning to Play and Playing to Learn* ([http://teamupforyouth.org/dynamic/attachables/media\\_filename\\_119.pdf](http://teamupforyouth.org/dynamic/attachables/media_filename_119.pdf)), which examines data on the impact that physical activity, including participation in organized sports, has on the academic and intellectual achievement of students.

### **What is the Governor's Challenge?**

The Governor's Challenge is to be active 30-60 minutes a day at least three days a week for a month. Californians taking the Governor's Challenge can choose to be active in any way they see fit, whether it is walking to and from school, playing "pick-up" soccer at recess and lunch, or playing on a basketball team after school. Any form of physical activity counts.

The Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, a non-profit, non-partisan organization, has been a vocal leader trumpeting the connection between academics and fitness. Under the leadership of Chairman Jake Steinfeld, the Council has been administering the Governor's Fitness Challenge for California students (as well as teacher, parents and others) for the past four years.

Schools that engage large numbers of students in the Governor's Challenge and also support good nutrition on campus can vie for one of three \$100,000 fitness centers, and one of eleven \$5,000 awards for physical activity equipment. Everyone who takes the Governor's Challenge qualifies for an individual incentive or reward.

### **Why are Californians participating in record numbers?**

The Governor's Challenge Competition is becoming an increasingly popular way for schools to encourage their students to be physically active. In 2006 the Governor's Challenge attracted

10,000 student participants, in 2007 it attracted 70,000 participants and last year it attracted 158,000. This year, schools have already signed up more than 250,000 students to participate.

The top three reasons the Governor's Challenge has become so popular are:

- It's FREE
- It's on-line and easy for schools to administer
- Participating schools report positive benefits to students' health and academic success

One indication of the Governor's Challenge positive academic benefits is that the average API scores (Academic Performance Index) of the 40 most active schools in the 2008 Governor's Challenge Competition was 835 compared to 742 for schools statewide last year, and I have been told the average increase on the API of these schools was twice as much as the state average.

**When/how to sign your school up to participate in the Governor's Challenge?**

May is National Physical Fitness and Sports month. Not coincidentally, it takes one month for students to complete the Governor's Challenge and this year's competition runs through May 31.

You can sign up your school to participate in the Governor's Challenge Competition today at [www.CalGovCouncil.org](http://www.CalGovCouncil.org). Once your school is signed up, you will receive posters, flyers and brochures on the Governor's Challenge that you can use to promote the Challenge and help your school compete for prizes.

Best of luck to you and your school!

Sincerely,



Glen W. Thomas  
Secretary of Education