Research Conducted by The Cooper Institute® Shows Positive Association for Health Outcomes for Students Participating in NFL PLAY 60 Programming

Longitudinal observation showed increased aerobic capacity and decreased body mass index for schools participating in NFL PLAY 60 programs compared to non-participating schools.

DALLAS, TX (January 17, 2017) Research conducted by The Cooper Institute through its NFL PLAY 60 FitnessGram® Project revealed annual improvements in aerobic capacity and body mass index for students participating in NFL PLAY 60 programming when compared to schools not utilizing NFL PLAY 60 programs. Over 33 percent of US children (6-19yrs) are overweight and obese, and it is estimated that 80 percent of adolescents do not achieve the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity. This study highlights a positive association of participatory system intervention programs adopted by schools in an effort to improve health in school-aged children.

The study, published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, was based on an evaluation of longitudinal FitnessGram data collected over four years from schools participating in the NFL PLAY 60 FitnessGram Project. The research team (coordinated by Norma Candelaria at the Cooper Institute) worked with the NFL Foundation to establish a participatory research network of over 1000 schools (up to 35 from each of the 32 NFL franchise cities) and has monitored fitness patterns in these schools over the past 4-5 years using the established FitnessGram battery. This specific study (led by Dr. Yang Bai, Assistant Professor at University of Vermont and Dr. Greg Welk, Professor at Iowa State University and Scientific Director of FitnessGram) compared schools that voluntarily participated in the NFL PLAY 60 programs (Fuel Up to Play 60 which was created by the National Dairy Council and the NFL, in collaboration with the US Department of Agriculture, and the PLAY 60 Challenge, created in collaboration with the American Heart Association) to schools that did not participate in these programs. Schools participating in the programming had significantly larger annual improvements in aerobic capacity as well as significant improvements in body mass index over time when compared to the non-programming schools. Furthermore, schools that implemented the programming for a full four years showed better improvements when compared to schools that participated for only two to three years. This is the first study to examine the long-term impact of prominent comprehensive school-based models, such as NFL PLAY 60, when implemented under real-world conditions.

These results suggest the utility of the NFL PLAY 60 physical activity programming as a potential viable intervention to help improve youth aerobic capacity. This study also highlights the potential of such comprehensive school-based programs to help improve BMI scores in children. Considering the high rate of obesity in America, coupled with the global cost of physical inactivity, reversing these trends in youth is critical. Implementing evidence-based physical activity programming, combined with FitnessGram assessments, may help improve overall childhood health.

The project was supported by the NFL Foundation which partnered with The Cooper Institute to develop the NFL PLAY 60 FitnessGram Project to evaluate and implement NFL PLAY 60 programming in schools across the country. Continuing research with this large participatory research network offers potential to continue to advance both the science and practice of physical education programming in the U.S.

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ABOUT THE COOPER INSTITUTE
The Cooper Institute (CI), established in 1970, is a 501.c.3. nonprofit dedicated to promoting life-long health and wellness through research and education. Founded by Dr. Kenneth Cooper, The Institute translates the latest scientific findings into proactive solutions that improve population health. Key areas of focus are research, adult and youth education, and advocacy. The Cooper Institute is home to the Cooper Center Longitudinal Study, the world’s largest and longest running observational study on measured fitness, and FitnessGram®, the most widely used youth physical fitness assessment, education and reporting tool in the world. For more information on The Cooper Institute, visit www.CooperInstitute.org.

About The NFL Foundation
The National Football League Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of those touched by the game of football – from players at all levels to communities across the country. The NFL Foundation represents the 32 NFL clubs and supports the health, safety and wellness of athletes, youth football, and the communities that support our game. For more information on The NFL Foundation, visit: www.NFLFoundation.org.
About Fuel Up to Play 60
Fuel Up to Play 60 is an in-school nutrition and physical activity program launched by National Football League (NFL) and National Dairy Council (NDC), founded by America’s dairy farmers, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The program encourages youth to consume nutrient-rich foods (low-fat and fat-free dairy, fruits, vegetables and whole grains) and achieve at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. As a result of the program, 13 million students are making better food choices by selecting nutritious options like low-fat and fat-free dairy products, fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Additionally, 16 million students are getting more physically active during the school day as a result of the program. Fuel Up to Play 60 is designed to engage and empower youth to take action for their own health by implementing long-term, positive changes for themselves and their schools. Customizable and non-prescriptive program components are grounded in research, including tools and resources, in-school promotional materials, a website and student contests. Visit FuelUpToPlay60.com to learn more.

About the American Heart Association
The American Heart Association is devoted to saving people from heart disease and stroke – two of the leading causes of death in the world. We team with millions of volunteers to fund innovative research, fight for stronger public health policies, and provide lifesaving tools and information to prevent and treat these diseases. The Dallas-based association is one of the world’s oldest and largest voluntary organizations dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. To learn more or to get involved, visit http://www.heart.org or follow us on Facebook and Twitter.