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EDUCATION

ISSUE: Broward schools find ways to reinsert physical fitness instruction.

With the American Heart Association and American Diabetes Association targeting childhood obesity as a public enemy, it's clear that the dismal lack of physical fitness is a significant problem.

Fortunately, the problem is getting attention in the Broward County public schools. At the start of this academic year, Broward schools launched the Commit 2B Fit program for third graders. Then, last month, the schools rolled out a companion program, Spoga4Kids, also for third graders.

The two programs teach children the importance of exercise and proper nutrition, with the goal of fostering healthier bodies and minds.

The Commit 2B Fit program distributed special planners to 17,000 kids. The workbook, which is filled with factoids about good health, encourages them to schedule workouts and nutritional meals along with homework and classes.

The Spoga program includes a series of 15-minute workouts that teach gentler forms of aerobics, relaxation techniques, and yoga-like moves, among other exercises. The goal is to use better physical fitness to improve mental alertness for learning.

The programs are sorely needed. Academic needs and the rigors of the FCAT testing regimen have cut down on physical education and recess time.

That's not the reason for childhood obesity. But the lack of physical fitness instruction, combined with poor habits at home, from a diet heavy on sweets and fats plus inactivity, is a formula for overweight kids.

The Commit 2B Fit and Spoga4Kids programs are worthy endeavors. They should be expanded to more grade levels, but to do so the schools need help from the community. They need more corporate partners to step forward.

**BOTTOM LINE: The fitness programs are
needed. more businesses and community
groups should offer support.**