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## Governor Kicks Off Fitness Challenge

By MARILYN BROWN, The Tampa Tribune

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TAMPA - When Gov. Charlie Crist kicked off a statewide fitness challenge Wednesday at Bellamy Elementary School, 800 students clapped and cheered.

They were ready to do the broad jump, 300-yard shuttle run, 40-yard dash and other feats to earn certificates, T-shirts and maybe \$10,000 for their school.

Details of the eight-week program for elementary students were announced Wednesday, with the deadline to enroll next week.

On March 11, elementary students begin a 10-day series of Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests and makeup exams, so Hillsborough County won't require participation, Superintendent MaryEllen Elia said late Wednesday.

"We think it's a really good thing," Elia said. "Some schools are going to jump on this. Others will work hard to fit it in."

The district has numerous after-school programs, which may be where many participate, she said.

The program calls for schools to dedicate two 45-minute sessions or three 30-minute sessions a week to the program for eight weeks.

To be eligible for the eight money prizes - four schools get \$10,000 for athletic equipment and four get \$5,000 - schools must submit pre- and post-activity assessments. Students get extra points for trying activities or recipes at home from the governor's fitness Web site.

SunTrust Banks, Florida is contributing \$100,000 to the program and AT&T is contributing \$50,000, said a spokesman for the governor. Titus Sports Academy helped develop the program.

Schools or individuals must register online at [www.GovernorsFitnessChallenge.com](http://www.GovernorsFitnessChallenge.com) by March 7 with pre-test results due March 24.

Steve Vanoer, Hillsborough's supervisor for K-12 physical education and health, said that he will meet with staff today "and be getting together a game plan" to get out information about the state initiative.

Also Wednesday, Crist said he will push this legislative session to put middle school physical education requirements into law. A law passed last year requires 150 minutes a week of physical education in elementary schools, although districts work out details that can include health lessons or squats in the classrooms.

The governor's fitness council recommended 45 minutes a day of physical education in both middle and high schools. Sen. Lee Constantine, R-Altamonte Springs, has filed a bill to add physical education in middle schools, but he said Wednesday that he is negotiating time and other details with district officials and the governor's office.

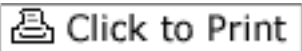
"Scientifically, it's been proven that the attention level of students increases" with physical activity, he said. "Let's be creative. You could take five minutes from every other class and put it into P.E."

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