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HICKORY, NC - Shuford Elementary and Catawba County Health Partners are leading the way toward optimal student health in Catawba County with a fun CATCH Kick-Off Week for students, staff and families.

CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) is a proven initiative that provides tools and resources to support schools in creating healthy environments for students, teachers and staff. CATCH supports classroom teachers, school administrators, cafeteria staff, physical education classes and families. Although the program has been in schools around the country for 25 years, this is the first time it has been used in schools in Catawba County.

Shuford Elementary is kicking off CATCH from February 6-10, coinciding with the school's Physical Education Week. During the week, each area of the school will support and encourage healthy eating and physical activity by emphasizing CATCH messaging, activities and lessons. The principal will include healthy messages in morning announcements, PE and classroom teachers will use CATCH activities throughout the day, the cafeteria team will post signs that help students identify healthy foods, and a CATCH newsletter will be sent home to families. After the kick-off week, Shuford Elementary will continue to promote a healthy school environment through sustainable and fun messaging, activities, and resources included in the CATCH framework.

"Our local schools and districts have a great history of supporting student wellbeing. CATCH will provide resources, messaging and coordination to help make the healthy choice the easy choice in all of our schools," said Zack King, coalition manager for Catawba County Health Partners. "Kick-off weeks allow schools to celebrate and promote healthy eating and active living throughout the entire school."

In December, Catawba County Health Partners hosted CATCH training for teachers, school administrators, and parents from all three school districts in Catawba County and for community partners from Catawba Valley Medical Center, YMCA of Catawba Valley, Discover Wellness, Broome Insurance, Lenoir-Rhyne University's Solmaz Institute, and Catawba County Cooperative Extension. There are 33 community members who are certified to implement the program, 14 of whom now have the knowledge and skills to train and support other teachers and staff. These volunteers will be instrumental in bringing the program to other schools.

Catawba County Health Partners anticipates the adoption of CATCH at more area schools in the future. Newton-Conover City Schools, Catawba County Schools, and Hickory Public Schools will determine which schools could benefit from CATCH, and through their Student Health Advisory Councils (SHAC), Catawba County Schools and Hickory Public Schools are working with Health Partners to support student and staff health and wellbeing.

In addition to support from school district leaders, and school administrators and staff, school health nurses are instrumental in bringing CATCH and other health-related initiative into the school environment.

Catawba County Health Partners is participating in The Duke Endowment's Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas initiative. This funding and support addresses chronic health issues such as unhealthy weight, diabetes and heart disease. Health Partners is involving leaders from a wide spectrum of community organizations to develop ways to engage residents in improving their health. Currently, work is centered on encouraging healthy environments in schools and faith communities, as well as connecting individuals to opportunities for physical activity through their primary care provider.

Catawba County Health Partners fosters partnerships aimed at sustainably improving Catawba County's health priorities of healthy eating, active living, and chronic disease prevention. Using the Catawba County Community Health Assessment as a guide, Health Partners serves as a community focal point to help identify needs, mobilize resources, facilitate collaboration, bridge gaps and coordinate community-wide efforts toward improving our county's most critical health issues. Through community coalitions, the 501©3 organization, which is managed by Catawba County Public Health, creates an environment in Catawba County that increases opportunities to make healthy choices.

Based in Charlotte, and established in 1924 by industrialist and philanthropist James B. Duke, The Duke Endowment is a private foundation that strengthens communities in North and South Carolina by nurturing children, promoting health, educating minds and enriching spirits. Since its founding, it has awarded more than \$3 billion in grants.

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