

Last modified: Thursday, May 21, 2009 4:05 PM EDT

## State's first lady supports local exercise initiative

**FRIDAY MAY 22, 2009** Daniels flies in to Huntington U. to learn more about KidFit

BY MIA BLOCHER

First Lady Cheri Daniels landed onto Huntington University's campus via helicopter to witness Northwest Elementary School's KidFit post-test event on Wednesday morning.

KidFit, an exercise program aimed at increasing children's ability in the classroom by increasing their level of physical activity, is a partnership between Huntington University and the Huntington County Community School Corporation.

"Exercising before school increases the blood flow in the brain and gets their heart rate up," said KidFit Director Erin Holloway, a physical education teacher at Northwest and Andrews Elementary Schools. She explained the kids work out for 45 minutes before school starts and their physical condition and test scores will be tracked over a three year period to see if there is a correlation between physical fitness and academic success.

Last August, Daniels came to watch the 16 KidFit participants go through a physical pre-test. On Wednesday the students met Daniels at Huntington University for the post-test which involved running a mile, doing pushups for one minute and stretching and flexibility.

Daniels believes the program is vital for the health of Indiana's kids.

"Look at the numbers of childhood obesity that we're struggling with right now. We've just become a very sedentary society . . . we eat fast food, we sit, we play electronic games,"



Indiana First Lady Cheri Daniels speaks to students of the Kid Fit program at the Huntington University track Wednesday morning. Kid Fit is a partnership with Huntington Community School Corporation and Huntington University to try to increase academic scores by increasing physical fitness. (Herald-Press photo by Rob Edwards)

she said. "We really lost the importance of physical activity. (KidFit) is a great program. It gets kids moving and it gets kids thinking about doing exercise and getting stronger . . . Good habits start at a young age and this is definitely a good habit."

Students showed a huge increase in physical fitness - one shaving nearly eight minutes off the mile run time. Dr. Matthew Ruiz, assistant professor of exercise science at Huntington University and lead investigator of KidFit research, said some students showed academic improvement during the 2008-2009 school year, but nothing can be substantiated until the end of the three-year study.

"Science knows that if you exercise you're going to get physically fit," he explained. "We've reiterated that, but the real key is the academic stuff, but we don't know that yet."

The kids, sweaty, red-faced and beaming, had a blast and enthusiastically completed all the physical tests. Some even offered to run an extra lap after the mile run.

Third grader Skylar Houser said she loved exercising before school, especially playing volleyball or kickball. Second grader Hannah Johns also had fun.

"I loved how we would run and play games. It's so much fun!" Johns said.

Both Houser and Johns will participate in the program next school year.

Daniels encouraged all the students to remain active throughout the summer, not just during the school year.

"It's something you should work into your schedule everyday just like you get up in the morning and wash your face and brush your teeth," she told the kids. "Make sure that you also have time to do some sort of physical activity every day because it's only going to pay off for you in the long run and I want you all to be strong and healthy for the rest of your life."

The program is currently open to a limited number of Northwest Elementary School students. Holloway and Ruiz are working to obtain grants to make KidFit available at other HCCSC schools.

"We'd love to be able to grow the program out of the current school that it's in and bring it into other elementary schools and really use the Huntington School Corporation as a model for the whole state and even bigger," Ruiz said.

Among other activities of the day, Daniels stopped by several county elementary schools to read to students.