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***Fighting Obesity with Video Games***

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A group of eager 9 and 10 year olds from the Kiran C. Patel Charter School entered the KRKade Research Lab's red, yellow and orange pint-splashed interior yesterday to give it high-tech video game fitness equipment a try. It met with the children's seal of approval.

The doors of the lab, the first university interactive children's fitness research enter, opened in the USF Physical Education Building on Monday.

"The kids were all smiles," said Arron Prather, a fifth-grade teacher at the Patel School who also works as a private trainer with USF athletes. "They've found a way to get kids to exercise without even realizing it."

The lab's interactive fitness system, called exergaming, combines video games and state-of-the-art fitness and training equipment. Specifically trailed for children, it includes simulator, virtual reality and plug and play games such as X-board, a professional grade snowboarding simulator, and GameBike, a plug and play video game allowing users to control the movement of an onscreen bike with their entire body.

"Exergaming zones such as the one at USF possess great potential for combating childhood obesity and other health problems because the engage children so well," said Lisa Witherspoon, who worked with USF School of Physical Education Director Stephen Sanders and ITech Fitness- A Denver based company specializing in this equipment.

According to a study by the national Center for health Statistics, more than one in six adolescents in the US are overweight, which is more than triple the rate from 1976 – 1980. Childhood obesity can lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes later in life. According to a projection by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, it is expected that one in three children born in the United States five years ago will become diabetic.

Additionally, the cost of treating obese children and the obese adults that grow into taxes the health care system. The annual health care costs of obese children outpace the costs of their healthy peers by an average of \$172 per child, according to a 2007 study by researchers at the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine.

