

Hear How It's Done: Kentucky Health and PE Teachers Mobilize to Get a Seat at the ESSA Table

Issue: With the passage of the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) in late 2015, health and physical education are now rightly considered critical components of a student's well-rounded education — but there are no guarantees that funding will funnel to health and physical education (HPE) or that these programs will be prioritized without aggressive and strategic action.

In order for health and physical education to be well represented in the ESSA process, especially as funding decisions are still being framed, SHAPE America members and other HPE professionals need to have a seat at the table. The proactive campaign launched by members of the Kentucky Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (KAHPERD), a SHAPE America state affiliate, serves as a powerful example of how this can be accomplished.

SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators is the nation's largest membership organization of health and physical education professionals. The organization sets the standard for health and physical education in the U.S., and its National Standards for K-12 Physical Education serve as the foundation for well-designed physical education programs across the country. SHAPE America was also a proud member of the coalition that developed the National Health Education Standards, and is a founding partner of the Presidential Youth Fitness Program, *Let's Move!* Active Schools (now Active Schools) and the Jump Rope For Heart/Hoops For Heart programs.



KAHPERD Project Team with Congressman Thomas Massie at SPEAK Out! Day.

The Big Idea: Realizing that the passage of ESSA was just the beginning of the work that needed to be done, KAHPERD sent a team of members to SHAPE America's 9th annual SPEAK Out! Day in Washington, D.C., in March 2016. As part of the two-day event, these individuals learned about the intricacies of ESSA, gained new advocacy skills, and met face-to-face with their congressional representatives on Capitol Hill. After returning to Kentucky, the state affiliate team mounted a comprehensive effort under the leadership of Executive Director Jenny Dearden and President Jamie Sparks to increase advocacy efforts and drive home the need to get maximum funding for health and physical education and representation in the state ESSA plan.

Implementation: Adopting the unifying theme, "Show Me the Money," the state affiliate sent an e-newsletter to all members, chock full of ESSA resources and SHAPE

America support materials in order to educate them about the importance of engaging in the ESSA implementation process at the national, state and local level. Included was a template letter with key ESSA messaging that could be sent to Kentucky Commissioner of Education Stephen Pruitt and the Kentucky congressional delegation.

The team learned that Commissioner Pruitt was hosting a series of statewide town hall meetings to seek input on the design of a new state education accountability system that would be used to improve schools and celebrate their educational progress, as is required under ESSA. Here was the perfect chance for health and physical educators who work in the trenches to share their eye-opening stories that illustrate the critical need for health and physical literacy in Kentucky schools. KAHPERD recruited between two and five members to attend each town hall meeting to speak about the importance of health and physical



Sarah Fitzpatrick speaking at a Kentucky ESSA Town Hall Meeting about the importance of health and physical education.

Takeaway: Persistence pays off. “Kentucky serves as a great example of what our states can accomplish when they take the lead and spread our important message,” says Carly Wright, senior manager of advocacy for SHAPE America. “This is a critical time for us to ensure that health and physical education programs get access to

education, and the need for those subjects to be included as priorities in the state’s ESSA plan. At each meeting, which often stretched on for hours, these members got attendees up on their feet to engage in a few minutes of fun movement.

“Everyone was happy and smiling after having the opportunity to get up and move at the meetings, and immediately made the connection that kids would be the same way, returning to class from physical education or recess refreshed and eager to learn,” says Dearden. The light bulb went on about the importance of physical activity during the school day.

To reinforce important message points, Sparks spearheaded a social media campaign using the Kentucky Department of Education sponsored Twitter hashtag #KYEdListens. Among the many Twitter followers retweeting his messages were Commissioner Pruitt and Kentucky Senator Rand Paul.

funding and support.”

Sparks adds, “We all need to do a better job to make advocacy a normal part of what we do. It only takes two minutes to send an email to your members of Congress via the SHAPE America Legislative Action Center. We have no right to complain about the results if we do nothing. We have to be part of the solution.”

Results: Kentucky health and physical educators’ efforts resulted in Commissioner Pruitt becoming a strong, new advocate for health and physical education. In fact, during Pruitt’s remarks at hearings on ESSA before both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, he referenced the importance of offering health and physical education to students and the benefits that they reap. He also lauded the contributions and comments shared at the town hall meetings by health and physical educators,

Project Team

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when sharing the results of those meetings with the Kentucky State Board of Education. Two health and physical educators were also named to the statewide committees in charge of crafting the final Kentucky ESSA plan.

Before SPEAK Out! Day and the resulting advocacy letters, tweets, and town hall meetings, Kentucky decision-makers simply had no idea that health and physical education programs were not being funded or adequately supported. With KAHPERD efforts, they got the message loud and clear.

“When one teacher told a senator that her entire physical education budget was \$200, he couldn’t believe it,” says Dearden. Wright adds, “That’s why we need all of our members to lend their voices to the effort. It is exactly these ‘jaw-drop’ moments that make a difference.”



SHAPE America’s National Standards for Physical Education

The physically literate individual:

- ✓ Demonstrates competency in a variety of motor skills and movement patterns.
- ✓ Applies knowledge of concepts, principles, strategies and tactics related to movement and performance.
- ✓ Demonstrates the knowledge and skills to achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical activity and fitness.
- ✓ Exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others.
- ✓ Recognizes the value of physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression and/or social interaction.

Additional Resources

Links to more information about this program can be found at shapeamerica.org/casestudies.



50 Million Strong by 2029 is SHAPE America’s commitment to empower all children to lead healthy and active lives through effective health and physical education programs.