

Unification of the Health Education Profession Presentation
AAHE Past President Steve M. Dorman
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As I began my master's degree program in health education at the University of Tennessee in 1981, I can clearly remember faculty members talking about the need for and hopes that there would eventually be one major professional organization that represented and advocated for health education. Not long after that, later in the 80's, there was an attempt to coalesce SOPHE and AAHE but alas that was not to happen. As a concession, AAPHERD at that time agreed to allow for greater autonomy for its associations and for a time we found a way through joint committees to forge a relationship with our SOPHE colleagues. As the years have progressed, however, AAHPERD has become more centrally focused and the disparate and dispersed nature of our profession among the several professional organizations has led to a marginalization and frankly, lack of progress in health education in many settings.

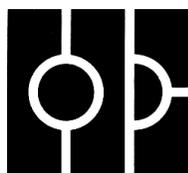
Over the years many of our national leaders and many of you have called for one national association to speak with one voice for health educators. Many of you remember Larry Green calling for this in the 70's. Indeed members of the AAHE Board of Directors through the years have expressed this individually as well.

As far back as 1981 Alan Henderson, Pete Cortese and colleagues in their *Public Health Reports* article identified a "lack of a single voice for health education" as a major problem confronting the profession. (Public Health Reports, November-December 1981, Vol. 96, No. 6; 555-559; The Future of the Health Education Profession: Implications for Preparation and Practice; ALAN C. HENDERSON, DrPH; JOAN M. WOLLE, PhD, MPH; PETER A. CORTESE, DrPH; DEBORAH V. McINTOSH, MPH)

And, Alyson Taub in her 1985 *Health Education Quarterly* article titled "One voice for health education: can this be achieved?" Said this:

"The problem for health educators is not the lack of professional associations, rather the multiplicity of organizations. In this case, more is not better in terms of professionalization. The goal is to have one voice for health educators and health education. The question is "How can this be achieved'?" (Alyson Taub; One Voice for Health Education: Can This be Achieved? *Health Educ Behav* 1985; 12; 293)

Well, I am pleased to report to you this morning –nearly 30 years after Alan and Peter wrote about this concern, that the events of the last 18 months have brought us closer to that goal of 'one voice' than we have ever been in my professional life.



American
Association for
Health Education

Let me briefly tell you where we are and how we have arrived here:

In the fall of 2008 the executive leadership of the National Association for Health Education Centers visited Reston to talk with me and AAHE Board of Governors representative David Birch about the potential of merging their efforts into AAHE. During this conversation they asked if AAHE had an interest in trying to unify the health education profession through “bringing together” several, if not all, of the national organizations that have a unique mission to represent health education and health educators. The interest of NAHEC in unifying health education helped to provide the stimulus for us to begin some bold moves in that direction.

At this same point in time, BOG representative Birch and I began a conversation with AAHPERD CEO Mike Davis about the potential of AAHE exiting from the Alliance for the purpose of unifying the health education profession. Although cautious at first, I think it is fair to say that CEO Davis was supportive of AAHE finding the best setting to achieve its mission and what was best for the health education profession.

In December of 2008, BOG representative Birch and I, along with AAHE Executive Director Becky Smith, met with the executive director, president and president-elect of SOPHE to assess if they would be interested in opening discussions around the unification of the health education professional organizations. The vision that we enunciated to SOPHE was one in which there would be one new unified health education professional organization. This new organization would comprise what had formerly been the two primary health education organizations (AAHE and SOPHE) and would eventually seek to bring in a student honorary society and the national health education centers organization. To create a ‘more perfect’ union of health education organizations, if you will.

While both groups acknowledged that there were hurdles that would need to be negotiated, there seemed to be a willingness on the part of both groups to begin this dialogue.

The Executive Committee of AAHE took the idea of unification to the AAHE Board of Directors. The AAHE Board voted unanimously in support of such an effort and in March 2009 AAHE issued a formal letter to the leaders of the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) asking them to consider entering into discussions with AAHE leadership for the purpose of exploring unification of the profession.

You might ask why AAHE and SOPHE first? Membership data indicate that although AAHE is the largest health education organization, SOPHE has been gaining steadily at the national membership level, and also has a number of strong state affiliate organizations. Unification of these two of the largest health education organizations would provide the strongest foundation to build upon as other professional organizations would also be invited to consider either joining or linking to a unified body to represent the health education profession. It has always been our goal to unify the entire health education profession which would include other member organizations, student groups and academic societies relative to health education.

In May 2009, the SOPHE Board of Trustees unanimously affirmed an interest in exploring unification efforts with AAHE; however some individual members of SOPHE have justifiably

questioned the value of explorations if there was no indication that AAHPERD might actually consider releasing AAHE and any of its programs, products and services. If an exit strategy for AAHE was not possible, such discussions would be futile.

During this time the AAHE executive leadership met several times with the AAHPERD executive leadership around this topic. We sought to understand what they would need as we pursued independence and continued to make it clear that our primary goal was to unify health education, not to create a competitor to AAHPERD. We also made it clear that it was our desire to pursue this exit in a collegial and professional manner. Finally we made it clear that we were committed to providing health education products and services to physical educators who also teach health. I might add here, that while the discussions were tense at times, we have been treated with respect and professionalism from the AAHPERD executive leadership. And, I believe they genuinely want the best for health education.

At the September 25, 2009 meeting of the Board of Governors of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD), the following motion was presented for consideration: “It is moved that the Board of Governors endorse AAHE’s efforts to develop a formal exit plan for AAHE to separate from AAHPERD in order to unify the profession of health education. This plan will be developed by a committee identified by AAHE’s leadership and the AAHPERD Executive Committee. This plan will include strategies to serve AAHPERD members who have responsibilities for school health education. This plan will be presented at the March 2010 Board of Governors meeting for consideration for further action.” This motion passed 12 for and 2 against.

In addition to the motion about AAHE, other organizational issues and motions before the AAHPERD Board also suggest that time for winds of change were blowing for the entire AAHPERD structure. These include:

1. A proposed strategic vision prepared by the staff, at the request of the AAHPERD Executive Committee, for re-unifying the Alliance into one national association.
2. A motion from the National Association for Girls and Women in Sport (NAGWS) to cease to be a national association within AAHPERD and support the formation of a Council in AAPAR focused on physically active girls and women, and explore developing a university based Center outside AAHPERD to carry on the NAGWS mission.
3. In addition, leaders of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) and the American Association for Physical Activity and Recreation (AAPAR) are in discussions about the potential to join into one organization to eliminate duplication between these associations.

Up until that September 2009 BOG meeting, the SOPHE and AAHE leadership had agreed to hold in confidence these discussions. It was felt that until there was some real possibility of AAHE’s exit there was no need to alert the profession. With the vote of the Board of Governors, the hopes of exit became more potent and we found it necessary to begin to talk more publicly about potential unification.

Many of you will remember that last November I sent a message to you all which discussed much of this and which invited your input. Many of you have sent emails and correspondence

and I appreciate that. In addition, to make sure that we were informing and representing the wishes of our professional membership, a membership survey was conducted around this topic in January. Around 300 of you responded to that survey:

Among all respondents, 67% supported or strongly supported AAHE separation from AAHPERD, and only 18% objected or strongly objected to AAHE exiting AAHPERD to unify the profession. Even among members who considered themselves AAHPERD members first and AAHE members second (probably "second checkers"), 49% supported AAHE's separation from AAHPERD and only 23% did not support it. Regardless of length of professional service, or years of AAHE/AAHPERD membership, support for an AAHE separation from AAHPERD to unify the profession was strong: 64% among those with less than 3 years in the profession or less than 3 years of AAHE/AAHPERD membership, and 64% and 74%, respectively, among those with more than a 20-year work history in health education, and more than 20 years AAHE membership.

To facilitate the discussions around AAHE/AAHPERD exit and AAHE/SOPHE unification, two ad hoc groups were assembled. An AAHE/AAHPERD Exit strategy group consisting of Tom Davis, David Birch, Kelli Brown, Mike Davis, Monica Mize and Judy Young has met and is currently discussing the logistics of an exit plan. This includes the exit process and the logistics of exit, to include the AAHE assets that would transfer to a new organization. This also includes what happens to the AAHE name, what happens to the journals and the other assets of AAHE.

A second group, the AAHE/SOPHE Unification group consisting of Steve Dorman, Becky Smith, Dixie Dennis, Bill Potts Datema, Elaine Auld, Diane Allensworth, Rob Simmons and Daniel Perales met together in December 2009 with an organizational analyst for the express purposes of understanding the common concerns and issues surrounding unification.

More recently, at the March 2010 BOG meeting, a motion reaffirming the September motion that AAHE continue to develop an exit plan strategy.

The motions to the BOG provides acknowledgement that AAHPERD is fully apprised of the unification goal of the AAHE leadership and further supports the concept that if unification of the health education profession becomes possible; AAHPERD is willing to consider an exit strategy for AAHE and those members who identify more closely with the health education profession than the physical education and sports related professions.

Let me reiterate: Our conversations with AAHPERD leadership have been professional and courteous. I might also add that we have been treated with respect and fairness in our talks with the AAHPERD leadership. We have made it very clear that our primary objective is to unify the health education profession. Throughout these discussions, AAHE leadership has made it clear to AAHPERD that there is no intent to harm AAHPERD in any way during, or as a result of, this process. In addition, there is a keen awareness of the many physical education teachers who also teach health education and that every effort should be made by any newly unified health education organization to reach out to provide support for those teachers in ways similar to AAHE current efforts. For example, we would be pleased to fill conference slots at the AAHPERD national convention with health education topics; we would be more than willing to

provide a regular health education column for the JOPHERD journal and share teaching techniques through a newly created teaching techniques journal. Also, the exit strategy currently calls for current copyrights of health teaching publications to stay with AAHPERD. Let me repeat: We are committed to providing services to those physical educators who teach health education.

The AAHE leadership has also continued to state that the unification vision is a stronger voice for health education in all relationships, within the school and higher education world, the public health world, and the health care/allied health professions world. If AAHE members and health educators in other professional organizations indicate that a unified national organization is not in the best interest of health education, the AAHE leaders have indicated they would not pursue this further.

Is this a done deal? Far from it. In many ways this entire process is far from coming to conclusion. It is clear that if this happens it will be a multiyear, multistage process involving a large number of people and a variety of organizations. We may now be at very critical phase however. A phase in which we need your help...the grass roots support and help of each person here today.

In September 2010 the AAHE Board of Governor's Representative will present the plan developed by the AAHE Exit Plan Committee to the Board of Governors. If that is approved it will go to the Alliance Assembly for ratification. Each of these steps will require strong input and work from members in this room. I would like to ask your commitment to be involved in this process. We need AAHE members to talk to your district and state representatives and make presentations at your district and state conferences in the next year about this.

It is fitting that we talk about this very important topic here in Indianapolis for two reasons... first, Indianapolis has been called the crossroads of America. In many ways AAHE is at a crossroads. We are in a transitional time with our executive directorship. It appears that the Alliance itself is at a transitional time as three of the current associations are either dissolving or seeking to merge. We are transitioning to a new generation professional -- one who joins and uses professional organizations differently than WE did in the past. Our country is at a financial crossroads causing many organizations and professionals to reconsider the number of professional societies which they can support. And I will be bold enough to say that health education is at a crossroads. Will we find strong health education programs in schools and communities in the future? Will our professional preparation programs survive? We need to speak with one loud and strong voice. A voice that is given strength through one large and unified professional organization.

Friends and colleagues WE are at a crossroads. The easiest thing to do is to pursue status quo. The challenges and hurdles of the road ahead to unification will be daunting. But most things that are worth anything come together under great pressure. I ask that you join us and persevere to the goal of unification. The vision that was enunciated by Larry Green, Alan Henderson, Peter Cortese and Alyson Taub is within our grasp... let's make it happen.

A second reason that Indianapolis is a fitting place for this discussion is that Indianapolis is one of the “states of Lincoln.” Recently I discovered that Abraham Lincoln grew up in Indiana. His family spent most of his child and adolescent years in this great state.

In 1861, after a brutal election campaign in which he won with less than 40% of the popular vote, Lincoln faced a country not only divided by his election, but also split over what was surely to be this nation’s greatest test of moral resolve – the abolition of slavery. In fact, by only a month after his election one state had already declared secession from the union. In an effort to urge the people forward in his first inaugural address in March of 1861 Lincoln appealed to a divided nation to allow “the better angels of our nature” to prevail in the days to come.

Dear friends and colleagues, in March of 2010 nearly 130 later I would borrow Lincoln’s words and ask over the next weeks and months that we allow the ‘better angels of our nature’ (as he put it) to prevail. I would ask that we seek a higher plane as we negotiate our settlement with AAHPHERD and as we reach across the aisle to our brothers and sisters in SOPHE and other professional organizations to make as I mentioned earlier “a more perfect union.” If we do this, if this is successful, generations of health educators who follow will look back on this point in time, this transitional crossroad and “call us blessed.”

