

# Advocacy in Action:

## TIPS & TECHNIQUES

### Advocating for Quality Physical Education at the Local Level

By:

*Phoebe Constantinou, Ithaca College, NY*

*Karen Dowd, FAHPERD*

*Sandra Sims, University of Alabama at Birmingham*

*Greg Bert, Black Hills High School, WA*

Perhaps you are a K-12 physical education teacher and have become disenchanted with all the cutbacks and minimization of physical education at your school, district, or state level. You see math, reading, science and other “academic” subjects being funded, thriving, and cared for. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has in fact left many of our students behind because it does not recognize physical education and health as core subjects. We know that quality, standards-based physical education makes a huge difference in the physical and academic lives of our students.

You have studied the research and have read books, such as *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and The Brain* (Ratey, 2008), and *Brain Rules - The 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home and School* (Medina, 2008). You understand that aerobic exercise prepares the brain for learning, minimizes classroom disruptions and leads to better test scores. Unfortunately your school, district and state just don’t “get it” yet. You want to act but understand that many districts and states simply are ignorant of the new research behind physical education and its positive correlation to quality health and well being and better test scores.

If this sounds familiar, you can do something about it. Never underestimate what the individual can do, and especially never underestimate what a committed, dedicated and passionate small group of physical educators can do.

#### Take It To the Next Degree

Think of yourself as the pot of water sitting on the stove. The temperature keeps rising but no changes have occurred yet. Soon the temperature reaches 211 degrees but it’s still just a pot of water on the stove. However, just one more degree and now that water is at 212 degrees. It’s a rolling, boiling, steaming power that can fuel an engine and eventually move mountains. Let’s be that one degree of change that makes a huge difference. We can “move mountains” by advocating for changes in physical education at our local levels.

Find an issue in physical education that you care deeply about and advocate for it. It might be adding physical education as a core subject in your state, daily physical education at your elementary school, or eliminating the cross crediting of marching band for physical education. There are many needs in our profession that need to be addressed. If we wait for

administrators and legislators to act on our behalf, we may be waiting a long time.

#### Options and Opportunities

It’s up to us to raise awareness of our issues and bring them into focus. Find out what other groups are doing, or create your own coalition to start working toward that critical change you are passionate about. Determine which policy makers you need to address: your principal, school board, state education agency? Develop a plan of action to maximize all of your people, technological and research-based resources. Find out what your colleagues in other states have done. NASPE’s new website has resources to help. Visit <http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/advocacy/governmentRelations/toolkit.cfm> to explore all of the various support documents for advocacy.

#### References

Ratey, John. (2008). *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and The Brain*. Little, Brown & Company. New York.

Medina, John. (2008) *Brain Rules - The 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home and School*. Pear Press. Seattle, WA.