

Advocacy in Action:

TIPS & TECHNIQUES

Using Neuroscience as the New Front in Physical Education Advocacy

By:

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It is a great time to be a physical educator! With the current emphasis of the First Lady's Let's Move initiative to lower child obesity in 20 years, we find ourselves on the brink of a new relevancy that we have not experienced since President Kennedy's challenge to America for increased physical fitness. There is new and exciting research linking academic success and higher test scores with increased physical activity and physical education. We must continue to advocate to school officials, other teachers, parents and our students that quality physical education is vital and more important now than ever before. Public pressure to eliminate childhood obesity in 20 years and increase test scores presents physical educators with a new challenge – one that can propel physical education to the “main stage” of a child's comprehensive education. Imagine physical education becoming the “hub” of the education picture – involving all fields of study with the physical educator as a valuable resource – to enrich the brain in and out of the classroom via movement.

Much of our advocacy has historically been based on addressing the obesity epidemic. We do need to continue to sell the importance of regular physical

education as the foundation of a comprehensive physical activity program to prevent obesity. It's now time to change the course of our advocacy tactics by stressing the importance of physical education as a means to raise academic/test scores. There is new research linking aerobic exercise and the teaching of complex motor skills with enhanced brain activity. There is empirical evidence that correlates physical activity and quality physical education with increased executive cognitive function and test scores. This new research is what will “sell” the importance of quality physical education to the general public, school administrators, parents and students. This new front is where we need to put a large part of our emphasis in advocacy.

So, how do we begin on this “new front” in physical education advocacy? Here is what we can all do this year to begin our “battle:”

1. Educate yourself about this new field of research:

- Read the book by John Ratey, *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and The Brain*. Read about Naperville High School and find how they are raising math and reading scores

through creative scheduling of physical education immediately before a math or reading class. Find out about “PE Literacy” class at Naperville High School. Pay specific attention to Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 explains how physical education class raised test scores in the entire school; Chapter 2 provides the science and research in a very easy-to-follow narrative.

- Read the book by John Medina, *The Twelve Brain Rules*. There is an excellent chapter regarding the cognitive effects of exercise and the brain.

- Read the book by Jeff Galloway, *Fit Kids- Smarter Kids* and go to www.jeffgalloway.com and look at the research that you will need to get across to your staff, parents and administration.

2. Visit NASPE's Let's Move in School website (www.letsmoveinschool.org) to connect to CDC's new research report on physical education and enhanced academic performance, or to download resources to enhance your physical education class.

3. Communicate current research in the field through:

- School newsletters
- Class newsletters

- Emails to staff members, parents, administrators

4. Teach this information to your students. They are the voters and policymakers of the future.

5. Be the resource at your school and district to get this information out.

- Send classroom movement ideas to classroom teachers.

- Meet with your school administration to organize a PE Literacy Class.

- Organize before-school running clubs to raise academic test scores.

- Write a physical education newsletter on a monthly basis promoting the benefits of physical education as a means to perform better in the classroom.

- At the secondary level, organize a Zero Hour (before school) physical education class so that more students may fit physical education into their schedule.

- Think of yourself as the “neuroscience” resource at your school and get the word out.

6. Work with state legislatures to get physical education and health education as core subjects in your states.

7. Write articles regarding your ideas or success stories to NASPE and AAHPERD.

8. Send editorials to your local newspaper concerning the importance of movement and physical education in raising test scores.

9. Develop a “Fitness Center” at your school where teachers may take their students for movement breaks.

10. Promote academic success via physical education routinely to your school principals.

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Useful Resources

American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, (2004). *Opportunity to Learn Standards for High School Physical Education*.

Berg, K. (2010). Justifying Physical Education Based on Neuroscience Evidence, *JOPERD*, Vol. 81 (3), March 2010.

Bert, Greg E., (2010). Teaching High School Physical Education According

to National Standards: The 6 Verbs of Success- Demonstrate, Understand, Participate, Achieve, Exhibit and Value., *Strategies- A Journal for Physical and Sport Educators*, March/April, Vol. 23, No. 4.

Pangrazi, Robert P. (2000). Promoting physical activity for youth., *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, Volume 3, Issue 3, September 2000, 280-286.

Summerford, C. (2005). Action-Packed Classrooms, The Brain Store Inc.



A global view of sport and physical education that combines an online and face-to-face approach to learning

This blended learning approach gives the opportunity to all individuals and organizations involved in physical education and sport to register free to the Sports Media Open Campus. The Open Campus is a web-based learning content management system that allows educators and coaches to create their own online physical education and sport courses. They can assemble, package and redistribute instructional content, easily retrieve, and import content. Visit <http://www.sports-media.org/atutoreng.htm> for more information.

Home page: <http://www.sports-media.org>.

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Nasco	25
Speed Stacks	37
Rollerblade	33
Polar	38
Playworld	back cover