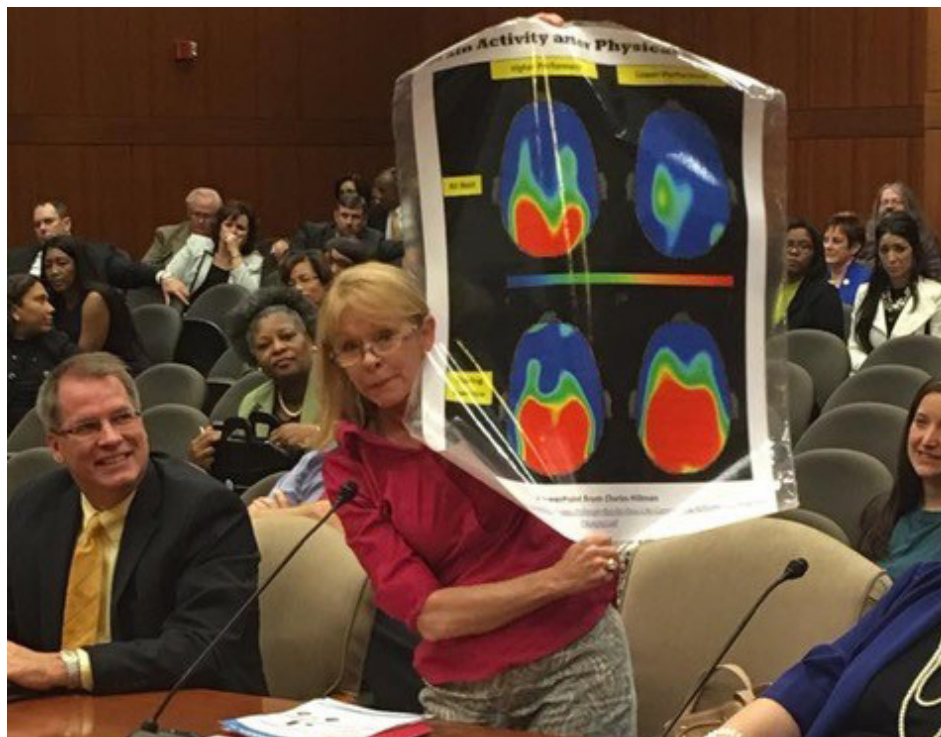


With Nowhere to Go but up, Louisiana PE Advocates Tip the Scales in Their Favor

Issue: “Louisiana is the highest-ranked state for both childhood and adult obesity,” notes Bonnie Richardson, physical education teacher at the Baton Rouge Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet (FLAIM) elementary school for the past three-and-a-half decades. While that grim statistic might seem to be reason enough to ensure funding for robust health and physical education (HPE) programs in Louisiana schools, she knew from experience that it wasn’t that simple. The only way to keep the state’s students active was to be an activist herself.

Richardson, a SHAPE America member, was president of the Louisiana Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (LAHPERD) when the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) passed in late 2015. By finally recognizing that health and physical education were critical components of a student’s well-rounded education, the legislation was considered a major victory, but the battle was far from over. Health and



Former LAHPERD President Bonnie Richardson spoke to the Louisiana Department of Education and testified in front of the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in support of ESSA funding.

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.

physical education could be included among the 18 subjects in the “well-rounded” realm, but funding allocations would be decided at the state level – and getting a proper share would require aggressive and strategic action.

The Big Idea: Shortly after the passage of ESSA, Richardson and LAPERD Advocacy Chair Jiji Jonas went to SHAPE America’s SPEAK Out! Day in Washington, D.C., which included a two-day training session on ESSA and advocacy, as well as an opportunity to speak to the Louisiana congressional delegation. The experience was beyond inspirational. “We got on fire,” she says.

Back in their home state, they attended a town hall meeting arranged by the Louisiana Department of Education (DOE) designed to gain input on educational funding options.

“We didn’t get recognized to speak until the very end, when DOE Superintendent John White asked, ‘What can I do for you?’” Richardson recalls. “I said, ‘Actually, it’s what we can do for you. We can help you come up with a cost-effective plan that would include physical education.’”

Intrigued, the superintendent asked LAHPERD to form a committee and devise a plan – which they would present to the DOE – for including physical education in the state’s ESSA. Richardson reached out to her Kentucky counterpart and friend Jamie Sparks, then president of the Kentucky Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (KAHPERD), which already had undertaken a massive lobbying effort to secure state funding for health and PE.

Based on Sparks' experiences and recommendations, Richardson pulled together a team that included the state physical education coordinator, three LAHPERD past presidents, educators from Louisiana State University (LSU), and representatives from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, an advocacy organization working to support childhood health through education, engagement and partnerships.

"They can help you bring all the data together and work with you to improve your health and PE programs," she says. "Getting their support was a win-win — and it helped to get the state DOE excited."

Implementation: With her foot in the door, Richardson was going to take full advantage of every opportunity to make her case for health and physical education. In the spring of 2017, she was asked to testify before the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in support of her group's efforts with ESSA. "The Board was evenly split on whether to accept the Louisiana ESSA framework, which incorporated our suggestions, and send it on to Washington — or keep it on the back burner," Richardson says. As one of the last to speak, she knew the pressure was on.

She had brought along a poster by Charles Hillman, professor of kinesiology and community health at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which included graphics showing the connection between childhood aerobic fitness and learning and memory. "A picture is worth a thousand words," she says.

Richardson spoke passionately about the impressive results she had witnessed in her own elementary PE program (recognized in a 2017 SHAPE America case study), and shared that students who did specific cross-body exercises at the start of the school day had greater focus and were ready for learning. At the end of Richardson's five-minute presentation, the audience broke out in applause.

Takeaway: "As the president of LAHPERD, I had to be vocal and visible and take on a leadership role," Richardson says, acknowledging that speaking in front of decision makers is out of her "comfort zone." She is determined to keep lobbying as long as necessary, knowing that Congress has yet to decide next year's ESSA allocations, and that the future of health and physical education is far from secure. "I'm trying to get more people to take on an advocacy role, because I'm not going to be around forever doing this," she says. "We need to finish doing what we need to do."

Results: Louisiana was one of the first states to have a physical education component included in its ESSA Framework, which was sent to Washington, D.C., in April 2017. So far, only eight states have had similar success.

Richardson continues to crusade to keep health and PE in the forefront of state decision makers' minds. "I've since been asked to be one of the 10 members of the Interest and Opportunities group, which meets quarterly with the Louisiana DOE to develop a plan to include all of the different areas and subjects in ESSA,"

Project Team

Bonnie Richardson, PE Teacher and LAHPERD President

Jiji Jonas, LAHPERD Advocacy Chair and Active Schools Coordinator

Erica Gilliam, Manager of the Healthy Schools and Community Programs for the Alliance for a Healthier Generation

Lynn Williamson, LAHPERD Executive Director

Kathy Hill, Former LAHPERD Executive Director and current LAHPERD Community Liaison and Tour de Fitness Chair

she says. "It is innovative in that they have asked teachers, supervisors and others to be a part of this planning, so that Louisiana presents the best to our students."

Richardson and Jonas recently returned from SHAPE America's 2018 SPEAK Out! Day, where Richardson participated in a panel discussion about Louisiana's successful advocacy efforts. Both women met with congressional aides to impress upon them how important it is to gain full ESSA funding in the future. "They saw how passionate we were about health and PE and the need for physical literacy among our students and promised that they would take our case to the senators and representatives," she says. "We will keep doing whatever we need to do to help our state reverse obesity."



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.

50 Million Strong by 2029

is SHAPE America's commitment to put all children on the path to health and physical literacy through effective health and physical education programs. Across the country, HPE teachers and other supporters are making an impact by taking action in the following areas:

- ✓ Effective Instruction
- ✓ Healthy Behaviors & Physical Activity
- ✓ Advocacy

Want to know how you can make an impact? Learn more at shapeamerica.org/50million.

