

## Minnesota Health and PE Advocates Make Valuable Strides Through Statewide Outreach

**Issue:** How do you turn state education officials into allies and advocates for your cause? “Seize every opportunity to reach out to decision makers and present your case,” says Mike Doyle, SHAPE America member and former president of the Minnesota Society of Health and Physical Educators (MNSHAPE). Sometimes, help can come from unexpected places.

After attending SHAPE America’s annual advocacy event — SPEAK Out! Day — in March 2015, Doyle and other MNSHAPE leaders on his team were keenly aware of the challenge they faced. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) had just been passed by Congress, but the burden fell upon advocacy groups such as Doyle’s to ensure that school health and physical education would receive state funding and recognition in the years ahead. With many other subjects competing for attention and money for the Title IV, Part A state block grants within ESSA, they knew they needed to mount a significant grassroots effort.

**The Big Idea:** Fortuitously, Minnesota Commissioner of Education Brenda Cassellius

**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.



Minnesota Commissioner of Education Brenda Cassellius, center, met with the MNSHAPE advocacy team to discuss the state’s ESSA plan.

is a former colleague of MNSHAPE Board Member Samantha Nelson’s mother. Although contact information for state and federal officials is publicly available, it never hurts to have a personal connection that may open doors — as was the case here. Doyle asked Nelson to set up a meeting with the education commissioner as soon as possible, and a June meeting was quickly arranged between Cassellius and the MNSHAPE team.

That meeting turned out to be the first time Cassellius had ever sat down with health and PE teachers to discuss the creation of Minnesota’s state ESSA plan. The teachers’ obvious passion for their professions — and the evidence presented about the benefits of movement throughout the school day — made a deep and lasting impression on Cassellius.

“We realized we had to keep the momentum going,” says Doyle, a high school physical education/developmental adapted physical education (DAPE) teacher whose unified PE class was recently featured as a SHAPE America case study. Before the MNSHAPE team left the meeting with Cassellius, they all posed for a photo, which Doyle promptly posted on Twitter. The commissioner retweeted the message almost immediately.

Using #LetsMove, she wrote, “15 minutes each hour throughout the curriculum and PE every day! Healthy kids = healthy minds.”

**Implementation:** Having garnered a new, important ally, the MNSHAPE team was encouraged and energized to continue their mission. Their next task, a month later, was to have a visible and vocal presence at Minnesota’s first public meeting to discuss ESSA funding allocations. State officials leading these meetings included a cross-disciplinary group of stakeholders and legislators, ready to hear the attendees — representing a variety of school subjects — present their case. The delegation of MNSHAPE members occupied the front row, wearing identical, bright-blue shirts emblazoned with the organization’s logo.

“We knew we needed to not just have PE teachers present, but also representatives from stakeholder organizations,” says Doyle. They rallied a coalition of heavy hitters, including the American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, state legislators, Minnesota students, principals and superintendents, college professors, future teachers, and others.

According to Doyle, one of the most powerful

speakers at the ESSA meeting was Kristin Busch, one of his students at Wayzata High School. “Her’s was the only student voice heard all day, and she received a round of applause,” says Doyle. “Everyone was impressed that a student would take time to come out in July and offer input on the importance of having PE included in the curriculum.”

The campaign picked up steam during the Minnesota Department of Education’s ESSA Twitter chat in August 2016. Doyle and several members of his advocacy group participated, as well as SHAPE America Director of Public Policy & Advocacy Carly Wright. “No other subject area was as well-represented as ours,” says Doyle. Sure enough, the Minnesota DOE’s post-chat Tweet singled out PE as a key part of a well-rounded education.

In November 2016, a webinar held with Commissioner Cassellius featured a tweet from Minnesota State Senator Susan Kent, which said she was “proud of the work in garnering broad-based support for #physed in MN schools.” The messages clearly were being heard, loud and clear.

Over an 18-month period, MNSHAPE members crisscrossed the state to attend all six DOE regional ESSA meetings, an ESSA state planning meeting, and an ESSA town hall meeting. Commissioner Cassellius and her team had led every meeting across the state, noting the presence and aggressive advocacy of the MNSHAPE delegation. The blue-shirted representatives displayed a contagious enthusiasm, leading attendees in activity and mindful movement segments to begin or conclude each meeting. The compelling evidence they presented about

the neuroscience of fitness and the need for effective health and PE programs in the curriculum had a resounding impact.

In April 2017, several MNSHAPE board members met with congressional representatives on Capitol Hill, asking for their support in fully funding the Title IV, Part A grant under ESSA. “Physical education is now considered part of a well-rounded education, yet many schools continue to reduce and cut this subject area,” Board Member Kirstin Guentzel told them. “PE is not your father’s PE. Students are now developing physical literacy skills through movement activities to improve their health and well-being.”

**Takeaway:** What the MNSHAPE team has learned is that persistence, effort and coalition-building can yield unforeseen dividends. “I’ve heard my counterparts in other states say they have no money for an advocacy campaign,” notes Doyle. “The fact is, this cost us nothing, except for time and passion. Sure, I paid for gas a couple of times, but who cares? I just want to keep everyone aware of our profession.”

He remembers a recent conference where speaker Keith Bakken, CEO of Wisconsin Health and Physical Education (WHPE), challenged the audience of teachers to see how fast they could come up with the names and email addresses of their local school board members. “Someone was able to do it in 10 or 15 seconds,” Doyle says. Bakken’s next question was, “Then why don’t you contact them and invite them to come into your classroom and watch you teach?” Says Doyle, “It was a great way to make the point that it’s easier than you think to reach out to people who can help you.”

## Project Team

- Mike Doyle**, Former MNSHAPE President
- Samantha Nelson**, MNSHAPE Board Member
- Megan McCollom**, MNSHAPE President
- Kirsten Guentzel**, MNSHAPE Board Member
- Sue Tarr**, Former MNSHAPE Past President

At the November 2016 MNSHAPE state conference, Commissioner Cassellius donned one of the advocates’ blue shirts and took the microphone to emphasize the importance of actively engaging in advocacy to further the profession. One year later, in gratitude for Cassellius’ support, Doyle presented her with the Presidential Award at the 2017 MNSHAPE conference awards banquet — an honor she shared with SHAPE America’s Carly Wright.

**Results:** In the Title IV, Part A section of Minnesota’s state ESSA plan, which was submitted to the U.S. Department of Education in September 2017, health and physical education are among only four subject areas (out of a possible 18) that were singled out as key to “a well-rounded education.”

The MNSHAPE advocacy group certainly isn’t resting on its laurels. Because there is a chance that Minnesota may have a new education commissioner after the gubernatorial election in November 2018, Doyle and his team are poised to make their case once again. They also have identified an ambitious new goal to achieve by 2021: Get the state to acknowledge “Access to Health and PE” as one of the accountability indicators of school quality.



## 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](http://shapeamerica.org/50million).

