Issue: Relatively few high school students participate in team sports, and fewer still receive scholarships to play at the college level. Yet physical education traditionally has focused on team sports and rewarded athletically gifted students for their skill, leaving other students to lose interest after fulfilling the mandatory requirement.

Could the educational system somehow be flipped to capture the interest of all students — throughout high school — and give them the tools to integrate health and fitness into their lives into adulthood? This was the question asked by SHAPE America member Cheryl Lambert and Geoff Wright, physical education teachers at Oak Hill High School in Wales, ME, during a summer brainstorming session a few years ago.

Big Idea: “Geoff and I started envisioning what our dream PE class would look like,” says Lambert. Their seemingly “pie-in-the-sky” idea was to offer students an individualized path to fitness, empowering them to set and achieve tangible goals along the way. The concept represented a complete departure from the PE they were teaching. “The idea sat around for a while, but when our school switched to a different block system and proficiency-based education, Pat Doyle, then our principal, encouraged us to try it,” she says.

Implementation: Lambert and Wright created the Fitness for Life Program (FliP), in which, ninth- and 10th-grade students attended health and PE seminars, selected their own fitness activities, and scheduled FliP time flexibly within the traditional school structure. Students accrued 80 points.
(one credit) per semester, based on intensity and duration of activity. Juniors and seniors needed to earn one PE credit of customized personal fitness.

FiP in action revealed a gym alive with music and energy, ninth- through 12th-graders engaged in activity under the watchful eye of the teachers and students. A golfer in one corner was working on his or her swing, pitchers and catchers teamed up in the batting cage, and others danced to an exercise video, practiced yoga, lifted weights or power-walked around the gym.

When the teacher called “Time to switch,” the students changed activities, remaining active, self-directed, and motivated for the full hour. They were responsible for setting up their own activities; logging into the FiP website to access curriculum, video, and webcasts; logging and tracking their points, and setting their own schedule. Students could work out during study hall to or independently before or after school.

“Another benefit of the program is that students with injuries, health, or mobility issues can be functional within the class setting and aren’t removed from PE. FiP helps them manage their issues, or can be part of the rehab process to get them back on their feet,” says Wright.

**Takeaway:** When students can take ownership by setting personal goals and choosing their own activities, they embrace fitness. Distributing the required points over the course of high school ensures continuity and the likelihood that healthy habits will continue for life. Lambert was fortunate to have her administration back the innovative program. Both the former and current principals were open to change and very supportive of the program. Lambert, who just finished her 12th year of teaching, says, “effort-based assessment, using heart monitors and pedometers, really motivates students.”

**Results:** FiP has truly flipped how students view PE and physical activity. “Before, you would never see kids after ninth and 10th grades,” Lambert says. “By spreading it out over four years, students stay active beyond high school.” Many students who did nothing before, insisting they didn’t want to be active, are now at the top of the class, and kids who graduated come back and tell us how much it helped them.”

Four years after its inception, Oak Hill High School is widely known for FiP. The program even benefits the students who choose to participate in traditional sports, such as football, softball and field hockey: The school’s previously non-winning teams have captured three state championships in recent years.

**Key Elements of FiP program**
- Assessment based on intensity (heart rate monitors and pedometers)
- Point system for tracking progress during semester
- Personalized programs by category: health and fitness; injury rehab, skill-based
- Seminar system for delivery of content
- Choice in scheduling
- Incorporation of technology, including website, online tracking, skill analysis via video

**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.

**Additional Resources**

Links to more information about this program can be found at shapeamerica.org/casestudies.

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SHAPE America’s commitment to empower all children to lead healthy and active lives through effective health and physical education programs.

*50 Million Strong by 2029*

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