Member Spotlight
Mario Reyna

Getting a piece of the $1.1B pie

Health and physical educators are no strangers to the challenge of securing sufficient funds to create or maintain a high-quality program. Since the recent announcement that $1.1 billion in Title IV, Part A, ESSA funding has been approved for FY2018, many educators might be asking themselves, “What do I need to do to get some of that money for my program? What resources are available to help me in the process? And what justification can I offer for my program receiving the funding it needs?” In a recent interview, longtime SHAPE America member, newly elected board member, and current chair of the $50 million-plus STEM and Arts Advocacy Committee Mario Reyna shared with us his answers to these questions and how he was able to access $40K of his school district’s Title IVA ESSA funding for this school year.

“It all starts with keeping our legislators informed, and SHAPE America’s SPEAK Out! Day is a huge part of that,” Mario says. He has attended SPEAK Out! Day twice himself, but when he cannot attend he still looks for ways to advocate. “I reached out locally to Congressman Vicente Gonzalez, who loves visiting schools. I invited him to visit a few of the schools in my district, and I actually ended up driving him that day. During our time in the car and after visiting four or five schools we got to talking about funding, for which he expressed support.” Mario emphasizes, “Even if we cannot always attend SPEAK Out! Day, we can still be lobbyists at the local level!”

The next step is to tap into helpful resources that are already available. “I don’t have to do my own homework to find out about ESSA,” says Mario. “Through Carly Wright and the SHAPE America advocacy website I became well-informed on how to ‘get to the table’. I have shared the SHAPE America resources with others, and in many cases, the information is new to people.”

“I reached out to Mr. Mario Reyna, a well-known health and physical education advocate. He shared his insights with me about how to access ESSA funding in his school district. Mario explained how he approached the funding process and what resources he used to secure the $40K for his district. He emphasized the importance of staying informed and building relationships with decision-makers. Mario also shared the challenges he faced during the funding process, such as time-consuming paperwork and the need to justify why the funding was necessary.

Mario Reyna is already planning on requesting $50K for the next school year. “I need to think about what the district needs. This time I would like to request funding for wrist heart-rate monitors for the middle school students and increase the number of physio balls for the elementary students.” Future success will depend on keeping up with existing relationships and building new ones, or as Mario describes it, “lobbying within the lobbying.”

One of the key resources that has informed and helped Mario is the "10 Top Tools for Health and Physical Educators," available on the SHAPE America advocacy website (shapeamerica.org/advocacy/essa). SHAPE America provides a wealth of additional resources and updates to help anyone who wishes to become a health and physical education advocacy expert. Mario would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional ideas (mario.reyna@mcallenisd.net).