As a burned-out K–12 physical educator turned physical education teacher education (PETE) professional, I have a teaching history rich in frustration, disappointment, disenchantment, fervor, excitement and hope. I stepped into the physical education (PE) profession at age 22, apprehensive but eager to teach high school students sport skills, game strategies and the value of a physically active lifestyle. Much to my surprise and frustration, my students were not terribly excited about getting a physical education and did not value activity and movement.

Early in my career (mid-1980s), there were no established PE teaching standards to guide planning or assessment. Fortunately, in the 1990s there was a paradigm shift in the PE discipline as it became less exclusive to sport preparation and more inclusive of health-related fitness. This shift was accompanied by government reports stressing the need for youth physical activity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996) and shepherded along by PE pioneers who saw the value and necessity of collaborative efforts between professional practice and scholarly inquiry (Corbin, 1993; Le Masurier & Corbin, 2006). Corbin (1993) outlined the challenges that our profession was facing in the early 1990s, including marginalization by
other academic disciplines in higher education and by physical educators themselves. Corbin urged PE professionals to “value” both their profession and the scholarly, scientific inquiry behind solid pedagogy.

**Standards for Change**

Gaining acceptance as a scientific and professional discipline in higher education has been pivotal for PE since many critical decisions for supporting or discontinuing professional teaching programs are made at this level. Evidence of these higher-education decisions has been prevalent since the turn of the 21st century, as many teacher preparation programs have seen dramatic decreases in student enrollment and program elimination (Koenig, 2014). The reductions in PETE programs are a response to decreased scheduling for K–12 PE and reduced full-time positions for PE teachers, which are outcomes that are counterintuitive to the holistic wellness needs of today’s youth. The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (now SHAPE America–Society of Health and Physical Educators) established standards for K–12 PE outcomes (National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE], 2004) and a set of initial teaching standards for early career educators (NASPE, 2009).

The newest SHAPE America National Standards (SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2014) are guided by best pedagogical practices and scholarly inquiry. The guidelines, which enhance the focus, purpose and credibility of the PE profession, are typically introduced to aspirant teachers in early program courses and are building blocks for advocacy. Educators who employ these standards in their curriculum, unit, and daily planning are honing a skill set that will enable them to transmit the value of PE at the grassroots level to their communities and educational stakeholders (e.g., parents, administrators, colleagues, students). Introducing and marketing advocacy skills to aspirant teachers can be achieved through guided efforts in PETE coursework and projects.

**Planting Seeds for Grassroots Efforts**

A four-tiered framework for the development of advocacy skills among teacher preparation professionals that reflects grassroots advocacy efforts and endorses the value of the physical and health education disciplines is outlined in Table 1. This table provides examples of projects from Ball State University’s health and PETE coursework, whose program has been accredited through the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation. Consistent engagement in standards-based planning and assessment that shows support and advocacy for the profession is the foundational, or Tier 1, level. Tier 2 builds on Tier 1 skills by introducing and encouraging community outreach opportunities. For PETE programs, on-site community school involvement is accomplished through practicum teaching labs, engagement in wellness events, and preparation and implementation of skill and fitness assessment — all of which improve the visibility and transparency of our profession. These projects, guided by teaching and learning standards, are evidence of collaborative grassroots advocacy between teachers and the community.

Purposeful interactions and communication with educational stakeholders are suggested as Tier 3 grassroots advocacy efforts. Showcasing PE curricula, assessment and current research support for movement education allows parents and administrators to see the “working mechanics” of physical education professionals. They see what their children are doing and learning, as well as the effect of movement literacy on youth. Additionally, many parent groups are willing to invest in academic programs and professionals that communicate financial needs aligned with academic outcomes and goals. Physical educators who learn and practice grant-writing skills will be able to effectively communicate equipment or professional development needs grounded in a standards-based framework. Finally, Tier 4 efforts are designed to disseminate best pedagogy practices and challenges in PE and health learning spaces. Aspirant teachers exposed to and engaged in professional development and pedagogy research begin to recognize their role in professional organizations (e.g., leadership, networking, idea sharing) and research-based practices.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Educators are implicitly engaged in grassroots advocacy as a part of their professional responsibility; however, purposeful advocacy efforts are critical to advancing our field. Aspiring teachers who are exposed to a variety of guided advocacy efforts during their undergraduate experience are better equipped to promote and advance health and PE within their schools and communities (Hurley, 2015). Programs and faculty that provide educational experiences for aspirant teachers at each tier of the proposed model are nurturing grassroots advocacy skills that these educators can implement early in their careers. The project examples (see Table 1) are designed to be progressive and build upon previously learned skills. Projects are introduced and promoted as grassroots advocacy opportunities and become sequentially more challenging as students navigate
through their preparation coursework. Students are encouraged to see these projects as tools for promoting their profession and bridging the gap between their classroom and the community. Additionally, PETE faculty members are encouraged to discuss and pursue the science behind their profession and challenge the stigma of “gym” class, sharing meaningful content and establishing rigorous expectations.

Success with advocacy-based projects during educator preparation fosters efficacy for early-career grassroots advocacy efforts. Although government and private-sector wellness programs have increased awareness of the health challenges for U.S. youth, the ground-up grassroots approaches (i.e., daily “best practices”) for increasing the societal value of our discipline are most empowering for educators. The charge for early-career teachers is to explicitly value and market themselves as PE professionals. Highly visible engagement in their schools and communities helps perpetuate “grassroots” advocacy and reinforces the merit of movement literacy for all individuals.

Table 1. Four Tiers of Grassroots Advocacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Engagement</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Specific Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tier 1              | Standards-based planning for instruction and assessment | 1) Peer-teaching lessons  
2) Practicum teaching lessons  
3) Practicum assessment projects |
| Tier 2              | Community collaboration and outreach | 1) K–12 teaching practicum at community schools  
2) Student assessment labs for community educators  
3) Health, fitness and wellness event development and implementation |
| Tier 3              | Communication with educational stakeholders | 1) Health and physical education discipline value presentations to:  
a. Parent-teacher organizations  
b. School boards  
2) Grant development for programing and equipment |
| Tier 4              | Professional outreach and dissemination | 1) State, regional, national presentations and leadership  
2) Professional journal submissions and publications |

References


Kimberly S. Hurley, PhD (kshurley@bsu.edu) is an assistant professor at Ball State University in Muncie, IN.

Submissions Welcome!

Readers are encouraged to send “Advocacy in Action” submissions to column editor K. Andrew R. Richards at advocacy@shapeamerica.org.

The purpose of the Strategies column “Advocacy in Action” is to provide tangible, real world examples of grassroots and national-level advocacy activities taking place in the fields of physical education, health education and physical activity. Submissions should be written in a conversational, practical tone. Columns should be 1,000–1,300 words, or roughly four typed, double-spaced pages.