Although the health benefits of regular physical activity and physical education are well known and generally accepted (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2010; Le Masurier & Corbin, 2006), physical education has been and continues to be a marginalized subject in schools (Lux & McCullick, 2011). This marginalization is perpetuated by government legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, that emphasizes high-stakes testing and performance in core academic subjects. As a result of the marginalized status of our subject, physical educators often face stakeholders (e.g., parents, children, colleagues, administrators) who do not understand or value their subject, pressure to prioritize ancillary roles such as coaching, and budgetary and program reductions (Richards, Templin, & Graber, 2014).
When physical education programs are threatened, children may not receive the education they need to lead healthy, active lives. As physical education teachers, it is our professional responsibility to be advocates and good stewards of our discipline. However, professional training for advocacy is limited and advocacy skills may not be second nature to all teachers (Devore, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to review four steps that can be taken by physical education teachers who are interested in engaging in local advocacy efforts. Although advocacy can also take place at the state and national levels, the foundation of advocacy is high-quality teaching and local initiatives.

**Step 1: Understand Quality Practices**

The first step in being an effective local advocate is to develop an understanding of high-quality practices in physical education (Richards & Wilson, 2012). Although a single, unified curriculum for physical education does not exist, some general guidelines for what constitutes quality programming are available. SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators defined quality physical education across four domains: opportunity to learn, meaningful content, appropriate instruction, and student and program assessment (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2003). These domains are intricately connected to the National Standards for physical education (SHAPE America, 2014), which define what a student should know and be able to do as a result of a quality physical education program. Richards and Levesque-Bristol (2014) added that quality physical education programs should instill a sense of self-regulated motivation in student participants, and Gaudreault (2014) argued that physical education should break from the traditional team sports–based curriculum to more completely address the interests of students.

**Step 2: Engage in Quality Practice**

Upon developing an understanding of quality practices in physical education, the next step is to aspire to the standard of quality. Developing and teaching meaningful lessons, building positive student–teacher relationships, and promoting engagement in physical activity outside of the gymnasium are all examples of how a physical education teacher can engage in quality professional practice. Physical educators should also stay on top of trends related to quality practices in the field. Engaging state and national professional associations can help teachers stay current with best practices. Reading professional journals, such as the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance* and *Strategies*, can also help teachers to keep up with changes in the field. Further, teachers can remain professionally engaged by collaborating with one another, both in and beyond their school building.

**Step 3: Be Proactive**

With a high-quality physical education program in place, teachers should be proactive in their local advocacy efforts by drawing positive attention to their programs among students, administrators, colleagues, parents, and community members (Devore, 2015). Such publicity can come in a variety of forms. For example, teachers can hang a bulletin board outside of their gymnasium highlighting student work in physical education, or they can send home a monthly newsletter to let parents know what children are doing in physical education. Other initiatives include Jump Rope for Heart or Hoops for Heart programs and family fitness nights. The key is to begin building relationships with stakeholders in the school and community by advocating for one’s program before reductions are proposed. All too often, advocacy is reactionary and tries to justify maintaining a program after it has already been threatened. By taking a proactive approach to advocacy, teachers may be able to prevent reductions from being proposed in the first place. It is much more difficult to propose cuts to a program that has been embraced by stakeholders.

**Step 4: Coming to the Rescue**

Despite our best efforts at being proactive advocates, there may be times when programs are still threatened. Unfortunately, the emphasis on core classes in No Child Left Behind can lead to budgetary restrictions or to the perceived need to trump physical education so that children can spend more time learning mathematics, reading, and writing. When program cuts are proposed, physical education teachers should increase their presence as advocates and reach out for support. State associations often have resources that can be shared with physical education teachers. As the chair of the Indiana Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, I have met with teachers from several school districts in which reductions have been proposed and have spoken at school board meetings in support of physical education. Student and parent letter-writing campaigns can document the impact of physical education, and teachers can also direct school board members to resources supporting the connection between physical education and academic performance (CDC, 2010).

**Conclusion and Final Thoughts**

Subject marginalization continues to be a reality encountered daily by physical education teachers (Lux & McCullick, 2011). It is imperative that the physical education community continue to advocate for the discipline in a multitude of areas, with the most foundational being the school and local community. Prior to being an effective advocate, one must develop an understanding of quality practices in physical education (Richards & Wilson, 2012). Armed with this understanding, advocacy begins by teaching quality physical education and staying on top of trends in the field. The next step is to publicize the program and garner support among key stakeholders to help prevent program reductions (Devore, 2015). This promotion is also helpful in that, if a program is threatened, it will already have the support of the school and community members. Critical to this conceptualization of being an advocate is the need
to begin speaking up for physical education before programs are threatened. Teachers who wait to advocate until after their school board has proposed program reductions will likely be too late.

References

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.


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