When I graduated from college in 1991, I had all the skills and knowledge that every other graduate with a bachelor's degree in health and physical education had. I was ready for the workforce. I was dedicated and ready to change the world. Our profession looks very different now than it did back in 1991. However, it is still true that people outside of the profession have a certain opinion of us that is not always positive. The good news is that we have information and resources today that help us to be the best advocates possible for our health and physical education programs.
One thing we do not learn in college is that we have a responsibility to be advocates of this profession at all times. Enthusiasm and passion for our work is essential. It is not a secret that the common core subjects do not have to justify their existence thanks to their high-stakes mandatory tests and emphasis on high achievement. We exist in an educational system where we constantly have to keep the concept of the whole child at the forefront and on the minds of those who are stakeholders. The advocate is not somebody else—it is you!

As a supervisor of health and physical education, I have often discussed with my colleagues across the country that our job title is slowly becoming nonexistent. It is becoming more and more prevalent for a principal, vice principal, or other noncertified physical educator to observe and evaluate physical education teachers. By virtue of that very fact, you have an obligation to make sure these stakeholders and decision-makers not only know what is going on in your classrooms, but know what they should be looking for in a quality physical education program. You must educate them about what effective teaching in our profession is and what our professional needs are.

What we know about physical activity and academic achievement sets the stage for a physical educator to ask for 20 minutes at their next faculty meeting. Classroom teachers need to feel the urgency of getting kids moving in their classrooms, and principals must use what we know about physical activity during the school day to make decisions that optimize learning for all children.

As physical educators, knowing what we know in 2013 about the contribution we make in this regard means that I will harshly challenge all who read this by reminding you that there is no excuse for inaction. If you remain silent, administrators and boards of education will continue to make decisions about your program based on their own experiences. We must approach our advocacy work with the notion that academic achievement weighs heavily on the minds of decision-makers. This knowledge should be our point of entry. We need to invite administrators into our gymnasiums to shine a spotlight on ways in which we infuse common cores in physical education. We also need to meet with classroom teachers and use our expertise to help them get students active in the classroom as a means by which to raise test scores and improve attendance and behavior.

One common example is waivers and substitutions. The time to advocate against the implementation of waivers is not when you are told that it is coming up for a vote at the next school board meeting. Advocacy for your program and its strengths should be happening all along so that no one can debate that your work has been front and center with your school, your students’ parents, and your administration. It is in this way that you can stand before your board of education and truly express a sentiment of surprise and misunderstanding about exempting athletes from physical education, for example. It should be before the topic arises that your board knows about your strong, diverse program offerings, use of technology, and commitment to best practice.

The teacher as advocate requires some effort on your part. It requires a plan. It requires strategy and partnerships. It requires that you take a step outside your classroom and draw others into the fold, understanding that you may actually have to be an advocate with your physical education colleagues who are falling behind. This is how we will catapult our profession forward. One teacher, one advocate at a time.

So, you may ask, how do I start? What do I do? Here are some quick tips to get started:

1. Have a physical education bulletin board.
2. Invite your principal into your classroom.
3. E-mail and call your students’ parents about their progress.
4. Start a newsletter or establish a physical education section in your school’s newsletter.
5. Ask to speak at your school’s next parent–teacher association meeting about physical activity and the brain.
6. Make sure your program is worth advocating for. In the end, the best program is a quality, 21st-century, standards-based physical education program grounded in best practice.

Please do not wait until tomorrow when it comes to promoting what you do. You are the expert in this field, and it is our duty to educate those around us that we are not just a time of day for kids to shake out their bodies. We are core to the learning process and that is a serious responsibility.

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