

best dropout prevention programs ever, continues to provide excellent outlets for physical vigor, cooperation, and in most cases, both character education and sportsmanship.

Thomas Jefferson said, "A child who is not physically well cannot learn." Keeping school-age children and school districts invested in quality physical education, physical activity, and health education programs requires only one thing—accountability. Many school-level needs listed by agencies such as NCDPI require mounds of money to implement—money that districts and administrators seldom have. However, it only takes some simple steps to get and keep quality in the activity arena. Programs such as Fit 4 Learning³ have proven that daily activity, even within the classroom itself, can contribute to academic growth. Many of the state's "smartest" elementary schools (according to EOGs) require daily classroom activities, often referred to as ice breakers, brain breakers, or energizers, in addition to organized, scheduled physical education conducted by a licensed physical educator.

With this in mind, we must focus on the issue at hand—investing in physical activity. We are fortunate to have some of the best people and organizations available at our fingertips when it comes to establishing quality physical education and activity programs within our schools. Professional organizations like the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AAHPERD),⁴ along with our district and state associations, are an outlet for much more than new games and activities. A mountain of information can be obtained by simply visiting the AAHPERD website. There are six associations under this umbrella and interested educators, administrators, and school board members visiting the National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) link will be stunned by the amount of information in the physical domain alone. On this site, a link to the "Principals Page" will disclose such topics as suggested job interview questions for prospective physical education teachers, physical education vs. physical activity, quality physical education, physical education program checklist, and mostly importantly, national standards for physical education.

School principals who are serious about teaching the whole child would do their students justice by reading "Shape of the Nation" on the NASPE website and then requiring their HPE department to rate themselves by using the STARS Program criteria. The website also offers a monthly "Tool Box" and "Archives" full of games and activities, many of which can be modified to fit school-level needs and facilities. On the state level, North Carolina offers physical educators an abundance of material and information through NCAHPERD's yearly conventions, periodic workshops, and publications. The North Carolina Physical Education Association (NCPEA) provides an assortment of sessions at the state convention and also at workshops throughout the year. Programs at these sessions are outstanding, meet all listed standards, and provide effective suggestions for working with kids. We are fortunate in North Carolina to have such creative and dedicated physical educators. The goal should be to get this level of professionalism in all of our school activity classes. Administrators should allocate existing

Implementing North Carolina's Healthy Active Children Policy

Heather D. Pope

In today's environment of television, computers, and video games, healthful living is a skill that must be taught and a habit that must be formed early. North Carolina has recognized this need. In 2003, our State Board of Education began discussing a policy that would mandate 30 minutes of daily physical activity for school children in grades K-8. The policy, referred to as the Healthy Active Children Policy (HAC), was mandated by state law in 2005.¹ Thanks to grant monies from the Health and Wellness Trust Fund, teachers in North Carolina get free training and resources to aid in policy implementation.

As a HAC trainer I have seen many classroom teachers go from trepidation to excitement when hearing of the program and seeing the available materials. When talking to a group of middle school teachers in Wake County I was emphasizing again that our kids desperately need to get up and *move*. I was surprised and delighted when a science teacher stood up, looked at her principal, and said, "I told you so!" Despite this initial positive reaction to integrating additional physical activity into our students' school days, there are quite a few schools across the state that are noncompliant.

In Lenoir County, we feel that we have identified a way to aid our schools to be in full HAC compliance. Thanks to the Zone Health Program (featured on page 483) which gave us the tools we needed to evaluate all of our health, physical education, physical activity, and nutrition policies and procedures, we identified some barriers to the success of the Healthy Active Children Policy in our schools.

Educators including teachers, principals, and central office staff are all under tremendous pressure to produce test scores that demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as mandated by the educational directives of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). A majority of our energy, focus, time, and money is spent toward this endeavor. Schools and school systems who do not meet AYP can lose much-needed federal funding. Since most schools are already underfunded, it is obvious why so much effort is put toward meeting this goal.

The HAC training addresses physical activity's benefits for increased brain function and learning along with health benefits. Since the training is designed for classroom teachers, not all principals and few central office staff have attended a training session. These are

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funds so their physical educators can take advantage of these opportunities and do follow up sessions to assure meaningful, quality activities are making their way back into lesson plans. In addition, Kymm Ballard, NCDPI consultant for physical education and athletics K-12, has worked tirelessly to align our state standards with those on the national level, thus allowing communication between administrators and physical educators to take place on a level playing field. And if money is actually a problem, both the national and state associations offer many grant opportunities.

There's a new physical education today and physical educators who have not waded into these waters are, along with their students, missing out on numerous fresh, fun methods to achieve fitness. Adventure classes, fitness classes, aerobic/dance classes, and personal training classes must be included as current student options, and teachers must be willing to reinvent themselves to keep up with the changes. The old days of sport games and weight lifting classes still have a place in the registration booklet, but the new listings are what a lot of kids are looking for today. It's not rocket science and it does not take a lot of money—just personal and administrative accountability.

In education today, the buzz words are 21st Century Learning and No Child Left Behind. 21st Century Learning is a framework of skills, knowledge, and expertise students should master to succeed in both the work place and in life. Core subjects are clearly focused in themes; however, a deeper study of the model reveals that along with standards and assessments there are life skills which fall under learning and innovation. These skills include critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and collaboration—all skills which are included daily in quality physical education classes. As physical educators we must expose our students to these skills while capturing the interests and attention of the students we teach each day. Our charge should be not only to facilitate classes based on the standards but also to inspire students with a variety of activity options that can be enjoyed for a lifetime.

In addition to that inspiration for students comes the inspiration we must provide to our colleagues through Staff Wellness Programs. In 2004, the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act was signed into law; one aspect includes the development of wellness guidelines for students and staff with goals for physical activity and other school-based activities. For educators this means structured after school programs, activity breaks during meetings, and staff icebreakers on workdays. The impact on students is through powerful role modeling—actions speak louder than words.

Since our state's HPE-EOC appears to have been abandoned, district accountability could still be promoted with the inclusion of quality physical education for all children covered by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. What we need is a No Child Left on Their Behind Act. Along with a new beginning of accountability in school-level physical activity would come the attention needed to assure attitude changes necessary to sustain the changes. Accountability or the AYP (Average Yearly Progress) can be pushed by the periodic assessments of each and every student in North Carolina. These assessments can be

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the individuals who most often make decisions about scheduling and what is expected of teachers in their classrooms. If these individuals do not understand the importance of HAC or what is required of their teachers to be in compliance with the policy, then following the policy will not be a priority. As a result, we cannot expect their teachers, schools, and school systems to make it a priority.

Our solution to the problem of HAC noncompliance is to give a short presentation to principals and central office staff highlighting how physical activity improves learning. There has been a growing body of research indicating that healthy children, fit children, children who are not overweight or obese, children who attend regular physical education classes, and children who are physically active are more successful in school and perform better on standardized tests such as those driving NCLB and AYP. We will draw on these research findings as well as the in-depth brain research Dr. John Ratey discusses in his book *Spark*² to help demonstrate to our educational leaders that physical activity is not only critical for our students' health, but for their ability to learn as well. Since student health and wellness, in addition to learning, is important to us in Lenoir County, it is our goal to ensure full HAC compliance as a result of the presentation.

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REFERENCES

- 1 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. *North Carolina State Board of Education Policy Manual [HSP-S-000]*. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction website. <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/healthfullivng/resources/policy/healthychildren/sbepolicymanual.pdf>. Accessed November 5, 2008.
- 2 Ratey JJ, Hagerman E. *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*. New York, NY: Little, Brown, and Company; 2008.

body mass index testing, or better yet, a test that encompasses all five health related components: cardio-respiratory endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, and body composition—all of which are currently found in the Physical Best Program. The President's Challenge would be another good alternative; it has been used for decades to recognize youth fitness and develop national norms for assessments. An interesting program getting a lot of attention in North Carolina at present is IsPOD (In-School Prevention of Obesity and Disease; featured on page 508). This program, coordinated and grounded by the SPARK Activity Program, is being piloted in several of our LEAs and could be adopted statewide and eventually reach the high school curriculum. Regardless of the assessment model used, it would be the AYP that provides the push.