In-Service Days Inspire Louisiana PE Teachers to Up Their Game

**Issue:** While many schools recognize the importance of quality in-service training to keep teachers abreast of new instructional methods, technological advances, and changes in laws and standards, this type of professional development is far from a “given” — especially in the field of physical education. In many states, PE teachers may not receive the training necessary to keep up with an ever-changing field.

“Someone could teach PE for years in an isolated environment and not receive professional development,” says Emily Pineda, manager of Early Childhood and School Health for the Well-Ahead Louisiana, Louisiana Department of Health (LDH). “During the in-service days, there is no one to give assistance to these PE teachers — they might have to attend a session geared to an English teacher instead of their own subject.”

**The Big Idea:** Well-Ahead Louisiana is working collaborative with the Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance other key partners to remedy this issue locally by provided professional development for physical education teachers. In 2016, the Healthy Schools Training Krewe (Training Krewe) was formed to bring professional development to schools and school districts. The Training Krewe is a group of expert trainers from different organizations that have joined forces to support healthier schools. At no cost, the Training Krewe provides professional development to those working to create healthier schools.

This effort is a part of a broader initiative, Well-Ahead Louisiana, launched by the Louisiana Department of Health in 2014 to promote chronic-disease prevention efforts across the state. Currently, Louisiana is currently ranked No. 8 in the nation for childhood obesity.

An estimated 2,500 teachers attend the Training Krewe workshops last year. Since the program’s inception in 2016, 59 school districts have received professional development. The 13-person cadre presents no-cost professional development workshops at state conferences and schools throughout Louisiana, often teaming up with agency partners such as Action for Healthy Kids, Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Health Enrichment Network, EatMoveGrow, and Fuel Up To Play 60.

The trainers include SHAPE America members Joanna Faerber and Andre Dicharry, who are passionately dedicated to helping their peers understand the concept of physical literacy and meet SHAPE America’s National Standards for K-12 Physical Education.

**Implementation:** The workshops integrate components of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model and focus on promoting evidence based strategies that support healthy eating, physical activity and physical education in schools, says Pineda. This work is support by the Department of Education through the CDC grant (Improving Student Health and Academic Achievement through Nutrition, Physical Activity and the Management of Chronic Conditions in Schools).

“The secret is in peers teaching peers,” she adds. “Some people you’d least expect to get excited about teaching PE really get inspired and realize why it’s so important.”

The work has been a real eye-opener for Faerber, a 2009 Elementary Physical Education Teacher of the Year, whose 31 year teaching career was spent in a K-12 lab school for the College of Education at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Today, many of the schools she visits are in isolated, underserved communities that have difficulty recruiting certified teachers who are newly entering the profession.

At one K-12 school with fewer than 250 students, she watched the 14 first-graders line up after class and walk to the hall, where they spent their 15-minute recess sitting on the floor, whispering to each other. It had never occurred to the teacher that the classroom break should include active play.

“The teachers are in desperate need of professional development and inspiration to support healthy and active students,” Faerber says. “Some schools don’t even have the resources to buy inflatable balls or beanbags for students to play with.” According to Faerber, it’s common for PE teachers in these areas to be pulled from football coaching — and conduct their classes using the same drills.
The three-hour, in-service workshops are welcomed “with open arms,” Faerber says. “The teachers are starving for professional development and eager to discover opportunities to expand. I’m constantly asked, ‘Will you come back?’ ‘Can you send us more support material?’”

Pineda typically pairs Training Krewe members such as Faerber and Dicharry with representatives from organizations like Action for Healthy Kids, Healthy Alliance, and the state DOE, which can help teachers access additional resources.

Dicharry is an expert trainer for the Training Krewe in addition to working his full-time job as a PE teacher at Caddo Parrish in northern Louisiana, near the borders of Arkansas and Texas. With nearly 20 years of experience and a master’s degree in education leadership, he thrives on the challenge of helping schools understand and align with the new state and national PE standards.

“We have a lot of work to do,” he admits. “In these rural areas, there aren’t a lot of new teachers, and teacher pay is a real issue. It’s very difficult to change an entire school culture around what PE should look like and to introduce the concept of physical literacy.”

In order to deliver effective in-service training, Dicharry must capture and hold the participants’ attention. His personal interest in applying technology in the classroom is reflected in his workshops, which incorporate entertaining YouTube videos. He introduces teachers who aren’t tech-savvy to social media outlets such as Twitter, which he uses regularly to find resources and connect with others in the field.

Results: An estimated 2,500 teachers attend the Louisiana Healthy Schools Training Krewe workshops last year, according to Pineda. Since the program’s inception, 59 school districts have received professional development on the implementation of physical education and physical activity programs, impacting some 593,559 students. The initiative’s efforts to create a healthy school nutrition environment has reached some 676,132 students in 89 school districts.

This year, the Training Krewe will focus on providing follow-ups to attendees and gather feedback after every presentation. “From past trainings, we have found that teachers say they are really inspired,” she says. “Often they come into the training not wanting to be engaged and come away with an understanding of why physical activity is so important. One of the most common comments we hear is, ‘If I’m enjoying these activities, then I know my students are going to love it.’”

Takeaway: “Everyone deserves a job where they can learn and grow,” Pineda says. “So much has changed in physical education, and what teachers learned 15 or more years ago is often no longer relevant or sufficient to meet today’s standards. There is so much more available to them if they know how and where to find it.”

“Because of the environment I came from, I can’t imagine not having professional development,” adds Faerber. “I’ve been very fortunate in my own career, and I’m passionate about teaching both teachers and children. This opportunity has showed me how much need is out there. We need to all work together to make sure we are reaching and educating all schools and all students.”

The Training Krewe is looking for additional trainers who are passionate about providing professional development to schools and school districts. To learn more or get involved, please visit http://wellaheadla.com.