

ESSA PE Op-Ed — Example 1

It was a rainy day, and our daughter Sofia, age 8, was stuck inside. She moved from chair to chair, tried reading, coloring and watching TV. She started doing some homework, but just couldn't focus. Nothing has quite satisfied her. She was grumpy, and she just wasn't quite herself. Come dinner time, no one wanted to be around Sofia.

The next day, the sun returned. Sofia spent the day outside, running, jumping and playing. She was happy as can be, and come dinner time, Sofia was once again her normal self -- the center of attention in our family.

If you're a parent, or just someone who knows how kids are, these two scenarios are probably all too familiar. In fact, you probably have a similar story from your house.

Unfortunately, it doesn't just happen on rainy days. For far too many kids in our area, it's happening every day in an unexpected place: school.

While heading to gym class was a frequent thing for most of us as parents or grandparents, it has become far less common for today's kids. Physical education is no longer a requirement in many schools, and even if kids do get PE, they're probably not getting enough time in the gym to really make an impact. In fact, a recent study from the American Heart Association and SHAPE America revealed that only 4% of elementary, 8% of middle and 2% of high schools provide daily PE or its equivalent for the entire year.

But [STATE NAME] has a chance to change that right now. Leaders in our state are working on an education plan for all of our schools that sets out the key goals and priorities to ensure our kids are getting a high-quality, well-rounded education. We should insist that physical education be one of the key indicators included in the plan.

PE is about much more than just exercise; it addresses the needs of the whole child. Quality physical education programs provide the activity kids need for a positive impact on their physical, mental, and emotional health. PE programs improve judgment, reduce stress, and increase self-esteem. Making sure all students are getting physical education is a critical part of keeping kids healthy.

It has also been proven to help kids do better in their academic classes. A Centers for Disease Control analysis showed a strong link between increased physical fitness levels and academic performance, driving improvements in cognitive skills, behaviors and test scores.

As our [APPROPRIATE BODY — STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, ETC.] decides what will go into our state's education plan, they would be wise to ensure access to regular physical education is a part of it. Every child, regardless of their age or zip code, needs and deserves the ability to be active during the school day. Including PE in the plan will make ensure that necessity is a reality.

Getting that regular physical activity will sure help our Sofia be and do her best.

ESSA PE Op-Ed — Example 2

If there was one simple thing you could do to help our kids learn better, feel better about themselves and be healthier, would you say no?

Would anyone?

Perhaps not on purpose. But that has been an unfortunate reality in our area as far too many schools have cut back on physical education, or PE, programs. PE isn't only about physical activity, though providing that to kids is critically important to their success. Quality PE programs, led by qualified instructors, support the needs of the whole child, positively impacting their physical, mental and emotional health.

Sadly, PE is no longer a requirement in many schools, and even if kids do get PE, they're probably not getting enough time in the gym to really make an impact. In fact, a recent study from the American Heart Association and SHAPE America revealed that only 4% of elementary, 8% of middle and 2% of high schools provide daily PE or its equivalent for the entire year.

But [STATE] has a chance to get back on the right track. Right now, our state's leaders are drafting and discussing our state's education plan, which sets out the standards and goals for every school in our state. The plan, required by law under the Every Student Succeeds Act, must ensure core academic subjects, like reading, writing, science and math, are taught, but it also requires our state to look at other indicators that prove our children are getting a well-rounded education.

Including PE as a key indicator is a critical way to support student success.

The health benefits of having more physically fit kids are well known, including ensuring their long-term health and helping prevent chronic disease. But the benefits of regular PE in school extend throughout the rest of the school day as well.

Research from the Centers for Disease Control confirms that active students are better students, showing a strong link between increased physical fitness levels and academic performance. Structured physical activity in school drove improvements in cognitive skills, behaviors and test scores.

Quality PE programs also help make sure that our children are on their way to a stronger future. Physical activity can help kids avoid tobacco, and reduce their risk for insomnia, depression, and anxiety. Numerous studies have demonstrated that physically fit children have higher scholastic achievement, better classroom behavior, greater ability to focus, and less absenteeism than their unfit counterparts.

[STATE]'s state education plan will set the course for our schools — and our kids — for years to come. Including PE in the plan will help ensure we give our kids a better chance at leading healthier lives and doing better in school.

It's a simple thing our state's leaders can do, and its impact will last for a generation.