ACCELERATING NATIONAL COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH REINFORCING PARTNERSHIPS

TEACHERS GET ADAPTED P.E. TRAINING TO HELP SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

All school children can benefit from physical activity, including those with developmental or physical disabilities. Children with special needs, however, often fail to receive the modified instruction they require to fully participate in physical education classes with their peers. The Salem-Keizer School District does not offer specific adapted physical education classes for its special needs students, resulting in an inconsistent approach to teaching children with disabilities. The American Heart Association (AHA)’s “Oregon Kids Move with Heart” program worked with district staff to provide professional development on adapted physical education techniques. This gave educators the knowledge and skills they need to modify activities for students with special needs so that students can participate with their classmates and acquire the same active habits that will prepare them for a lifetime of healthy living.

The Challenge

One in three youth ages 2-19 are overweight, making them more susceptible to developing pre-diabetes, high blood pressure and other factors for cardiovascular disease. At the current pace, 467,643 cases of diabetes and 989,454 cases of hypertension are projected by 2030 in Oregon. These youth are also at greater risk for social and emotional problems including stigmatization and poor self-esteem. Inactive, overweight children are also more likely to grow up to become sedentary adults. Oregon currently has the 22nd highest adult obesity rate in the nation, with about 1,500 residents dying each year as a result. Getting sufficient activity can especially be a concern for students with physical or development disabilities. Although these special needs students can benefit from exercise, many of their teachers are inadequately trained in providing them with safe adapted physical education.

Although I’ve implemented a variety of the adaptations presented, Greg’s warm-up routine has completely changed my classroom. My students love taking on the leadership role of guiding their peers through daily warm-ups."

– Andrea Pfau, Weddle Elementary School teacher in the Salem-Keizer School District

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The Solution
The AHA’s Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing (ANCHOR) Partnerships Program, “Oregon Kids Move with Heart,” set up a professional development session for physical education teachers in the Salem-Keizer School District. On January 27, 2017, the instructors received a four-hour training from Greg Lukshaitis, an adapted physical education specialist. Lukshaitis, who was named National Adapted Physical Education Teacher of 2015 by the Society of Health and Physical Educators, provided strategies for working with students who have physical limitations or other factors that interfere with their ability to participate in traditional physical education classes. He also explained adapted physical education techniques that can enable students with unique needs to find success in fitness drills, games and sports.

Sustaining Success
Following the four-hour training session, Salem-Keizer physical education teachers now have the ability to work more successfully with their special needs students. Equally as important, these teachers have expressed plans to share their newfound knowledge and techniques with their colleagues. According to surveys conducted with those who completed the training, the teachers plan to share the information they learned with others so that adapted physical education can be easily incorporated whenever necessary, and so that all district physical education teachers have a common approach to working with students who have disabilities.

Policy, System and Environmental Change
The professional development training provided to Salem-Keizer physical education teachers has equipped them with the tools and skills necessary to implement national adapted physical education standards to their students with special needs. It also will help physical education teachers prepare and fully embrace a new state policy on minimum physical education requirements that is currently set to go into effect at the start of the 2017-18 academic school year.

Results
Until recently, Salem-Keizer physical education teachers have been limited in getting help to teach students who have physical or developmental restrictions. Among the district’s kindergarten through third-grade students, 16 percent have a disability; among fourth- and fifth-graders, 21 percent have one.

The January 2017 professional development session organized by the AHA’s “Oregon Kids Move with Heart” ANCHOR team provided much-needed adapted physical education training to 64 Salem-Keizer teachers. Adapted physical education specialist Greg Lukshaitis provided strategies for working with students who have physical or developmental limitations. He demonstrated how to alter explanations and physically modify drills, workouts and games so that all students can be included in class activities, regardless of their mobility level or restriction. “Greg provided numerous examples on how we can better serve our adapted physical education community,” said elementary physical education teacher Andrea Pfau after attending the session.

Get Involved
Do you see a need for adapted physical education training in your community schools? Reach out to administrators in your district and encourage them to provide professional development to their teachers. Also, connect with your local parent-teacher association to see what kind of help they need to ensure such training sessions take place.