

# Transitioning gym class from sports to lifetime fitness

by Natalie Kennedy

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In the second year of a three-year grant, the Wellsboro Area School District continues the evolution of its physical education program from a traditional sports model toward a lifetime activity/personal fitness model.

In fall 2010, WASD announced that it had received about a \$550,000 Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP) grant through the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug Free Schools program. Brian Kennedy was contracted through the Tioga County Partnership of Community Health to serve as the project director.

The grant is to be used to acquire fitness equipment and data that will be used to revamp the physical education program and allow students to monitor their fitness level.

In the first year, the focus was on purchasing equipment to use in the revised program, such as stationary bicycles, treadmills, even mountain bicycles. This year, the focus has shifted to training of the district's physical education staff.

On Nov. 7-8, all physical education staff and Kennedy traveled to Titusville which is a model school for PE for Life initiative. PE for Life is an approach to physical education that advocates for paradigm shift from traditional sports model to one of more of a lifetime activity/personal fitness approach. Titusville has been altering its physical education program for 13 years.

PE for Life seeks to increase students' physical ac-



photo provided/Brian Kennedy

**The physical education staff of Wellsboro Area School District pose with DCNR staff at the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon overlook during a recent Hiking 101 training. Staff are learning methods of transitioning the district's sports-based physical education model to a lifetime fitness model.**

tivity/movement by introducing them to a variety of activities to pique student's interest in different activities. Music is an incentive and prompt in the program, said Kennedy. As students in all grades, elementary through secondary, enter the phys ed class, they automatically go to the warm-up stations. The music plays as they exercise and stops when it is time to move to another position.

The Titusville district is a strong believer in fitness-based academics, that exercise and physical activity set the stage for learning. Research at the University of Illinois shows the difference between a resting brain and a brain after exercise (see graphic).

"Contrary to the old belief that students won't be able to settle for learning, exercise does the opposite," said Kennedy. "As a result of our visit, we saw some things that they are doing here that we aren't doing here, but with few tweaks, we could. It's easy to see that we have what it takes with facilities, staff, curriculum and our approach, we could be doing what a model school does."

As a result of the visit, WASD decided to implement daily physical education class, incorporating health and driver's education, into every high school student's schedule. Details on how that will work and any curriculum changes will be addressed in the

next six months. Phasing time for daily exercise into the lower grade levels will

also be investigated.

"We're giving students the tools they need to be healthy now and the tools to continue to be healthy as adults," Kennedy said. "A student who is active in sports may be healthy now, but once they graduate, if they don't have opportunity to be active like they were in school, they may lose fitness and get chronic health conditions. If a student learns activities that they can do as adults, they are more likely to be fit as adults."

Titusville also provided a model to incorporate academic activities in phys ed class that reinforce classroom learning. For example, elementary students may trace letters as they warm up or recite the alphabet.

Another training attended by most of the physical education staff was Hiking 101, headed by staff from

the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Through a hiking curriculum, students not only learn hiking skills, but also learn:

- Health skills by planning and preparing a nutritious meal.

- Geography by learning how to read a topographical map and using a compass.

- Science by reviewing forestry conservation, deer management, invasive species, and more

- Arts and humanities through journaling or sketching what was observed.

The next training, Have a Project Adventure, is scheduled for Dec. 20 and will incorporate team building and social skill development. In effect, said Kennedy, this would help the physical education program become more cooperative rather than competitive.

Other projects are still in discussion phase. Kennedy hopes that the changes implemented within the school district will grow outward and be used by community residents and incorporated into the Wellsboro Parks and Recreation Department's programs.

"It could be a real positive thing not only for school, but community in general," Kennedy said.

For more information about the PEP grant, contact Kennedy at (570) 723-0520. Parents may also visit [www.wellsborosd.k12.pa.us](http://www.wellsborosd.k12.pa.us) for updates about Wellsboro Fitness for Life.

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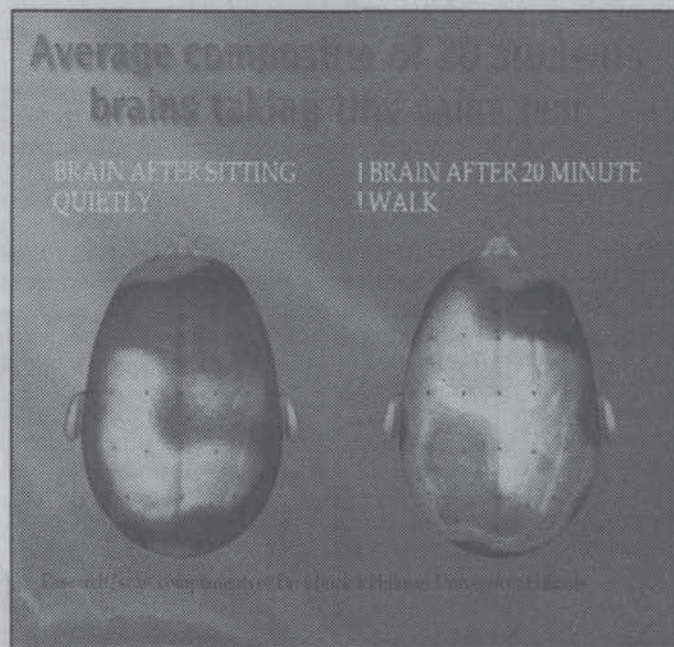


photo provided/Brian Kennedy

Notice how much more activity is indicated by the light areas in the brain after exercise (right). Research at the University of Illinois indicates that physical activity is good for learning.

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