

TARGETING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

for Beginning Physical Education TEACHERS

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Physical education teacher education (PETE) programs prepare physical education teacher candidates to teach using the National Standards for Initial Physical Education Teacher Education (SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2017b). The six standards relate to: (1) content and foundational knowledge, (2) skillfulness and health-related fitness, (3) planning and implementation, (4) instructional delivery and management, (5) assessment of student learning, and (6) professional responsibility. These standards provide teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills to be an effective beginning teacher. Although these standards are used as a guide to prepare physical education teacher candidates to teach, there may be differences in the degree of mastery of these standards achieved by teacher candidates. Therefore, the need for professional development is emphasized to teacher candidates during their PETE program.

As noted by Niemi (2015), teacher professional development functions as a continuum that starts during teacher education programs, continues into the first years of teaching, and lasts throughout one's teaching career. In the broadest sense professional development has been defined as activities that develop one's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2009). This broad definition of professional development includes informal and formal types of professional development that occur following teacher education programs, such as workshops,



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courses, observations of other teachers, teacher networks, mentoring/coaching, collaborative teaching and planning, beginning teacher programs, and sharing of teaching practices (Caena, 2011; OECD, 2009). Due to the range of formal and informal professional development opportunities available, beginning physical education teachers may need help navigating professional development opportunities specific to their needs.

For example, Josh, a fictitious teacher, recently graduated from college with his degree in physical education and landed his first job. Josh is aware that although he believes he is ready to begin teaching physical education, he still has a lot to learn to become a skilled physical education teacher. As part of his professional preparation, Josh learned that one of his responsibilities is to pursue professional development. He also learned that professional development was a way to stay current in the field, as well as strengthen any instructional needs that he may have as a beginning teacher.

Although the six national standards for PETE provide teacher candidates like Josh with the knowledge and skills to be proficient beginning teachers, PETE programs cannot prepare teachers for all the challenges of their new job. Physical education teachers need opportunities for professional development in order to enhance their teaching skills, as well as learn new teaching techniques, adapt to increasingly heterogeneous groups of learners, and stay current with educational research. Therefore, the purpose of this article is threefold: (1) to discuss the professional development needs of beginning physical education teachers based on data extracted from the 2011–2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011); (2) to identify ways to enhance professional development in a manner that addresses the specific needs of physical education teachers, both veteran and newly hired; and (3) to provide recommendations related to advocating for professional development opportunities specific to the needs of physical education teachers.

Professional Development Needs of Beginning Physical Educators

Professional development has been shown to improve teachers' content knowledge and pedagogy that are associated with positive effects on student outcomes (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; DeMonte, 2013; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). This evidence base for professional development that improves teaching and learning includes the quality and effectiveness of professional development activities, such as coaching/mentoring, observing and discussing classroom practice, and collaborating with colleagues. For beginning teachers, early professional development programs, often called induction programs, have been found to enhance quality teaching among participants and help them meet professional challenges as they transition from student to teacher (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Patrick, Elloit, Hulme, & McPhee, 2010). In addition, Desimone and Garet (2015) noted that research has demonstrated the crucial role of school leaders' support for professional development activities in terms of providing time for teachers to participate in professional development and to implement the strategies learned.

While all beginning teachers need support through professional development, including but not limited to district-wide induction programs, novice physical education teachers have specific needs regarding professional development (Cardina & DeNysschen, 2018; OECD, 2009). According to the NCES (2011), most newly hired public school physical education teachers in the United States reported that they were well prepared to teach their subject matter, meet state content standards, differentiate instruction, and use a variety of instructional methods. While these teachers were confident in their ability to use these pedagogical skills, research results indicated that they struggled with classroom management as well



as with using assessment data and technology to support student learning (Cardina & DeNysschen, 2018).

Although beginning teachers had reported that they were prepared to assess students, many did not believe that they were as prepared to use data from student assessment to inform instruction (Cardina & DeNysschen, 2018). Therefore, professional development for newly hired physical education teachers is needed so they can use student assessment data to inform instruction. However, as James (2011) noted, physical education is often marginalized, which may affect the effectiveness of professional development specific to physical education instruction. Relatedly, the marginalization of physical education can make it difficult for physical education teachers to conduct meaningful assessments (Collier, 2011). This is unfortunate because being able to assess student performance and to use the assessment data is valuable in guiding the teaching-learning process, positively effecting curricular changes, and providing insight about student achievement in physical education.

However, there are many types of professional development that a new teacher such as Josh could pursue to use assessment in a meaningful way and to enhance his ability to use assessment data to support student learning. For example, he could seek professional development that would teach him how to use data to promote physical activity outside of physical education class. This type of professional development could teach Josh how to pedagogically collect data about students' current physical activity levels and challenge them to increase their physical activity by incorporating simple changes into their daily lives such as taking the stairs rather than an elevator, asking their parents to park farther away from a store entrance, or taking their dog for a walk. Students could share their successes and strategies for increasing daily physical activity with peers during physical education class and could note how they overcame barriers (e.g., busy schedules, bad weather outside, too much homework).

In addition, Josh could search for professional development opportunities where he would learn to use students' initial assessment information as baseline data, plan instructional activities accordingly, and then collect follow-up data from the students to inform his teaching effectiveness and document student learning. He may even recognize and highlight his students' improved physical activity levels by posting their names on a bulletin board or in a school newsletter.

The use of technology to enhance instruction has also been identified as an area of need for beginning teachers. In fact, over three quarters of newly hired physical education teachers specified that they were somewhat, or not at all, prepared to use a computer in classroom instruction (Cardina & DeNysschen, 2018). Beginning teachers like Josh could pursue professional development using computer technology to help plan developmentally appropriate instruction and consider students' individual abilities to further enhance the teaching-learning environment. Additionally, he could search for professional development that allows him to become familiar with current computer technology such as heart-rate monitors, pedometers, and movement-tracking applications (e.g. Garmin Connect™ Mobile, Map My Ride, and Map My Hike). This type of professional development would give Josh another instructional tool that he could use to motivate students to adopt physically active lifestyles through the use of technology.

Moreover, Josh may find that applications that track movement enrich instruction because they offer instant feedback that allows

students to monitor and adjust their fitness goals as needed. Also these technologies help students recognize that physical activity should be part of everyday life, such as climbing stairs or walking to school. In general, the use of technology in physical education facilitates students' acquisition of the knowledge and skills that are needed to adopt and maintain a physically active lifestyle, which benefits their overall health and well-being.

Classroom Management for Beginning Physical Education Teachers

Many beginning teachers struggle with classroom management and student discipline (Gordon, 2016; OECD, 2009). During the 2011–12 academic year more than one quarter of public school physical education teachers in the United States reported that they were just somewhat prepared to handle a range of classroom management or discipline situations (Cardina & DeNysschen, 2018). This finding makes sense considering that beginning teachers have relatively little experience in an actual classroom, and they would benefit greatly from professional development in this area.

In general, physical education teachers need professional development that enhances their skills to establish and maintain classroom behaviors, as well as the ability to create rules and routines that teach students to manage their behaviors. Additionally, physical education teachers need managerial skills specific to their teaching environments (i.e., outdoors, natatorium or gymnasium) to maintain safe and healthy learning environments and to increase student learning.

With regard to enhancing management skills, new physical education teachers like Josh should seek professional development that will improve their skills related to implementing transitions, routines and positive behavior management to create and maintain a supportive and engaging learning environment. Physical educators may also want to pursue professional development that enriches their communication skills to augment classroom management and create an environment that is inclusive of all students regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion or physical ability.

To summarize, there is research evidence that professional development for all teachers can lead to improvements in teaching practices and student learning (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone et al., 2002; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017); however, it is of utmost importance that beginning teachers seek professional development beyond their initial preservice education (OECD, 2009). Suggested tasks that a physical education teacher can do related to engaging in professional development that improves instruction and enhances learning for *all* students are provided next, as well as in Figure 1.

Role of School Districts in Providing Professional Development

School districts have the responsibility of providing meaningful professional development to beginning physical education teachers through their teacher induction programs. After districts become aware of the specific needs of beginning physical education teachers, they can begin to provide support to these teachers and guide them toward professional development experiences that address these needs in order to improve teaching practices and student learning.



Figure 1.
Tips to enhance professional development in physical education

School districts provide professional development to beginning teachers in the form of teacher seminars and classes, as well as by working with master or mentor teachers in a variety of ways (Cardina & DeNysschen, 2018; Carr, Holmes, & Flynn, 2017). In addition, districts may provide innovative professional development such as collegial circles where physical education faculty who teach at the same educational level meet regularly to talk about what they are doing in their classrooms.

Another way districts can provide meaningful professional development to beginning teachers is by allowing them to shadow a veteran teacher in another building for a day, to observe their teaching practices. This is a valuable professional development opportunity because these teacher-driven observations have been found to meaningfully improve both instruction and student achievement (Grimm, Kaufman, & Doty, 2014). Unfortunately, this type of professional development is not happening on a regular basis; notably, in 2011–2012 only one quarter of physical education teachers indicated they had the opportunity to participate in observational visits to other schools (Cardina & DeNysschen, 2018).

These induction programs provide robust professional development activities that have a positive effect on teachers' instructional practices and student achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Ingersoll and Strong (2011) reported that beginning teachers who participated in various types of induction programs performed better at classroom management, had better student questioning skills, achieved a positive classroom environment, had more student time on task, and modified learning activities to meet students' interests.

School districts can also provide professional development for physical education teachers through district-sponsored professional development that is offered to all teachers. For example, school districts often offer professional development that focuses on working with students with disabilities, as well as English language learners (ELLs). These professional development opportunities need to include physical education teachers; however, less than 20 percent of physical education teachers reported receiving professional development on how to teach ELLs during the 2011–12 school year (Cardina & DeNysschen, 2018).

Professional development for physical education teachers that focuses on teaching students with disabilities is also limited. Research results indicated that in 2011–12 only one third of physical education teachers reported attending professional development on how to teach students with disabilities (Cardina & DeNysschen, 2018). It is essential that physical education teachers have the opportunity to attend any district-level professional development related to teaching students with disabilities and ELL students. Professional development in these areas will greatly enhance physical education teachers' ability to provide supportive physical education experiences for *all* students.

Although district-based induction programs have been found to enhance the skills of a beginning teacher, seldom do they address the needs of teachers with a specific focus on teaching physical education. With this in mind, there are other opportunities that school districts can use to help enhance the instruction of physical education teachers. One is to allow them to attend conferences that are sponsored by physical education professional associations at the state and national level such as the annual SHAPE America convention.

Presentations at these conferences cover many topics; however, it is essential that beginning teachers select sessions to attend that address areas that are in need of improvement such as those identi-

fied in this article. An administrator (i.e., principal or department chair) or the teacher's mentor can help to identify conference sessions that are focused on specific teaching practices because doing so has been shown to increase teachers' use of those practices during instruction (Desimone et al., 2002).

Therefore, in an effort to ensure that the physical educator attends sessions that are focused on specific skill development needs, the administrator or mentor should communicate to the teacher which sessions to attend and then hold him or her accountable for attending the sessions. There are many ways to hold teachers accountable for session attendance. One way is to have teachers write a summary of what they learned and how they will implement it in the classroom. This summary could go into the teacher's personnel file and be shared with his or her mentor so that the teacher will have support in implementing what was learned.

Districts that support physical education teachers by helping to pay for expenses and allowing them release time to attend these conferences will benefit greatly in terms of increasing student learning in physical education, as well as providing the teacher a professional boost that maintains their excitement about the profession. Moreover, skills learned by attending conference sessions could be shared with other physical education teachers in the district during scheduled time in the contract year (i.e., days set aside for professional development), further enhancing the school district's investment in physical education professional development.

Advocating for Funding to Support Professional Development

Although school districts acknowledge the importance of professional development for teachers, it is often difficult for physical education teachers to receive financial support to attend conferences or to have substitute teachers while they are out of the classroom. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2016) provides funding for teacher professional development. Specifically, Title II ESSA funding can be used to provide professional development to improve the instructional practices of teachers (SHAPE America, n.d.).

The process for school districts to receive Title II ESSA funding is complex. In order for school districts to receive these funds, they must apply to their state education agency to receive their ESSA funding allocation. This application requires the local education agency (LEA; i.e., district) to analyze data, complete a needs assessment, and write a local plan to improve schools in the LEA. The LEAs must consult with a range of stakeholders in the development of their application for Title II ESSA funds, seek advice on how to improve student achievement, and describe how data and ongoing consultation will be used to continuously improve student achievement through the Title II ESSA-funded activities. Although the process to apply for ESSA funding is multifaceted, there are things a physical education teacher can do to advocate that physical education teacher professional development is included in Title II ESSA funding applications.

Josh became familiar with ESSA during college and understands that it has implications for funding professional development for physical education teachers; however, he does not know how to advocate for professional development to be included as part of the ESSA funding application that is completed by his district. Josh and other teachers like him can take several steps to make sure that physical education teacher professional development is included in the ESSA funding application that is submitted by the district.

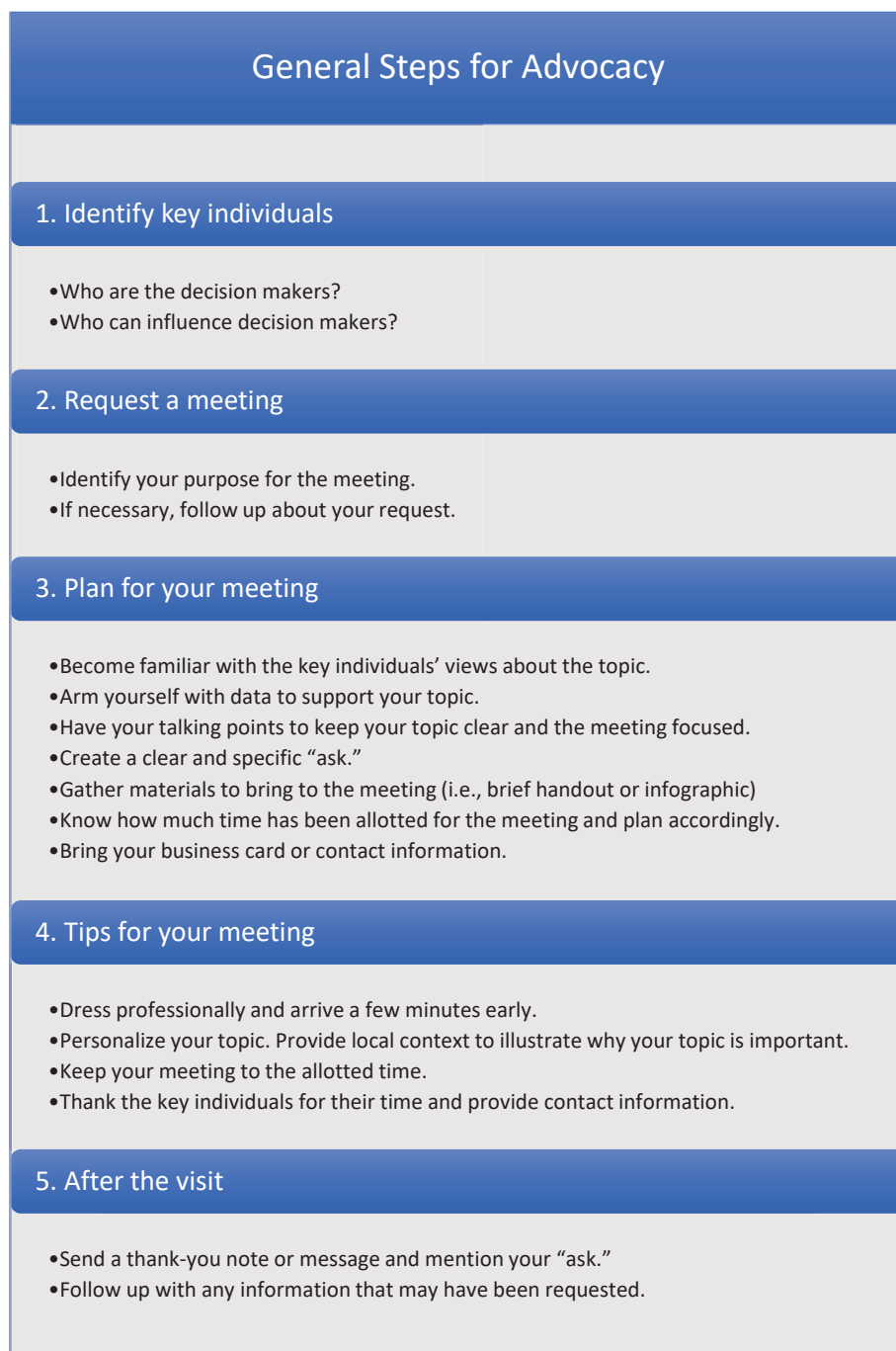


Figure 2.
Advocate for physical education professional development

As noted, part of the ESSA funding application requires completing a needs assessment. Physical educators should be involved in the creation of the needs assessment. One thing Josh could do is provide data regarding the professional development that is needed by physical educators to support teacher effectiveness and increase student achievement. Professional development needs of physical education teachers that are based on instructional data will be beneficial in the creation of the district needs assessment and will strengthen advocacy efforts for funds to support their professional development.

Second, Josh should find out who writes grants for ESSA funding in his school district and make an appointment to speak with them about how physical education teachers can benefit from Title II ESSA funding. Before meeting, Josh should make a list of talking points regarding why physical education teachers need specific professional development that will support student achievement and positively impact teacher effectiveness.

Third, Josh needs to be on the committee in his school district that develops school district funding plans to ensure that physical education teacher professional development is included as part of the district's application for ESSA funding. Through membership on this committee, Josh can provide a voice regarding why physical education teachers need specific professional development that promotes strategies that positively influence teacher effectiveness in the gymnasium.

While these three steps can help advocate that physical education teacher professional development be included in Title II ESSA funding, securing a spot on the district-wide committee that develops ESSA funding plans may be the most significant step with regard to being successful in the inclusion of funding for professional development.

In order to secure a spot on this committee, Josh should identify key individuals such as current committee members or an administrator who has influence regarding the district's committee appointments. The type of individual to look for may be someone who has been supportive of the district's physical education program or who has a passion for physical fitness and well-being. Next, Josh should schedule a meeting with this person to express his interest in serving the school district by being a member of the committee.

Before the meeting it is important that Josh makes a plan and becomes familiar with the key individual's views toward the physical education program. Additionally, he should think about his reasons for serving on the committee and how he will articulate them, as well as what valuable contributions he could make to the committee. It is also a good idea for him to use personal examples to illustrate why he would like to serve the district as a

committee member. Next, he should prepare additional talking points that will help make a case for his committee membership. For example, one talking point would be to describe how physical fitness positively influences students' academic achievement and the importance of physical education in teaching the knowledge and skills necessary to be physically fit. More talking points can be found using SHAPE America's (2017a) *Be a Backyard Advocate*. Finally, Josh should prepare a clear "ask," which in this case is to be included as a member of the district's committee that develops school district funding plans.

During the meeting Josh should share his personal story and his desire to serve the district to enhance student success and should present his “ask” to be a member of the committee (SHAPE America, 2017a). Josh should make sure the key individual he was meeting with has his contact information before he leaves the meeting. After the meeting Josh should follow up with a personal thank-you message. For an overview of how to advocate, see Figure 2, which lists general steps for advocacy (American Association of University Women, 2018; SHAPE America, 2017a).

Conclusion

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, the U.S. Department of Education (2017) concluded that, overall, professional development enhances teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogy in ways that are associated with improved learning for all students. These professional development opportunities may include learning activities such as workshops, courses, observations of other teachers, teacher networks, and mentoring/coaching. In general, professional development for beginning teachers is designed to help them meet the challenges of transitioning from student to professional, as well as meeting challenges that occur throughout their teaching career.

Data from the 2011–12 Schools and Staffing Survey (NCES, 2011) suggested that newly hired physical education teachers in the United States believed they were prepared to teach their subject matter, meet state content standards, use a variety of instructional methods, and differentiate instruction. However, they were less prepared to handle a range of classroom management and discipline situations, use computers and other technology for instruction, and use data from student assessment to inform instruction (Cardina & DeNysschen, 2018). Therefore, in order to meet the specific instructional needs of beginning physical education teachers, professional development should address areas such as those identified in this article in an effort to facilitate the acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed to become a more skillful teacher.

In addition to acquiring meaningful professional development to enhance one’s teaching practice, it is also important to advocate for funds to support professional development. Teachers who have the ability to advocate for professional development and gain the support of their district administrators will continue to grow as teachers.

In the end, physical education teachers are responsible for their own professional growth. While several professional development opportunities exist, physical education teachers need to seek out and advocate for professional development that will improve their teaching effectiveness and positively impact student learning. Moreover, one of the most notable ways in which physical educators can enhance their professional knowledge, skill and expertise throughout their career is to maintain continual membership in their local, state, and national physical education associations, such as SHAPE America.

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