

Recovering Your Body

Time for a class in PE. *by Thom Forbes*



As proud as he may be of the achievements of his players and coaches during his years running competitive sports at Beverly Hills High School, Richard Keelor likes to talk about a different accomplishment: a citation given to the school by the state for its physical education program, which, he believes, had a far greater impact on the student body than the winning athletic teams.

Fitness is not just about having a buff body, says Keelor, a former star collegiate athlete who went on to earn a Ph.D. in physical education from the University of Southern California. It's also about getting kids to the point where they have sufficient self-esteem "to choose to do what's right for themselves and for others." Kids with low self-esteem, he says, are prone "to succumb to the pressures of peer groups and the artifacts of society that create aberrant and abusive behaviors."

Indeed, the *Renew* Advisory Board member and *RenewEveryDay.com Mind, Spirit, Body* blogger sees the deterioration of PE programs in schools around the country as a national tragedy that has had major implications on health. Research bears him out. According to a study published in the journal *Addiction* in May 2011, teens who play team sports are less likely to smoke cigarettes or use drugs through early adulthood than teens who don't play team sports.

So what's a parent to do? There are concrete steps you can take,

Keelor says, to help our youth get the ounces of prevention necessary to reverse scientists' analysis that obesity will reduce life expectancy for the average American by as much as five years in coming decades. It boils down to two words: Get engaged.

Start by asking your local school administrators and board of education about the PE program in your local schools. Is there accountability? Testing to measure progress? Are vital signs of health—weight, blood pressure and resting heart rate—regularly charted? Are fitness programs fun and non-exclusionary? Are there interventions and remediation for at-risk kids? Do we encourage youngsters to find a lifetime activity—swimming, rock climbing or tennis—that will get them off their duffs? Are we modeling good fitness behaviors ourselves?

In our sedentary culture, it's entirely possible for kids to never raise their pulse rate above rest for weeks at a time, Keelor says, and nearly impossible to keep them from becoming obese because they're not burning any calories.

"If we lead the world in obesity and it's the leading cause of chronic disease," questions Keelor, "and we don't have quality physical education in our schools, what the hell are we thinking?" ■

For research on the benefits of physical education and links to groups active in encouraging youth fitness, go to: RenewEveryDay.com/RESOURCES/youthfitness.aspx.