



## *Souhegan Teacher Honored as the Eastern US*

### *Teacher of the Year*

#### *Passion for Fitness and Commitment to Professional Growth Shines National Spotlight on Lisa Kent*

How do you know when a high school program is successful? In Physical Education, one important indicator is that students meet the state standards for proficiency in personal health and fitness, enjoyment of activity, and sportsmanship.

But how do you know when a program is wildly successful? “Students’ desire to work hard – I mean full-out hard, sometimes for two hours, at 7:30 in the morning – means they have intrinsic buy-in. This was totally unanticipated, and is what excites me the most about the Physical Best Fitness program at Souhegan,” says Lisa Kent of Souhegan High School in Amherst, NH.

#### ***Professional growth critical to success***

Lisa is the 2010 Eastern District Physical Education Teacher of the Year for the Secondary/High School Level. Selected among teachers from Delaware to Maine, Lisa typifies the mission of the Teacher of the Year award. The award recognizes five key attributes of a successful teacher: 1) Maintains a high quality physical education program; 2) Uses various teaching approaches to meet the needs of all students; 3) Serves as a positive role model epitomizing personal health and fitness, enjoyment of activity, sportsmanship, and sensitivity to the needs of students; 4) Participates in professional development opportunities; and 5) Provides service to the profession through leadership, presentations, and/or writing.

Lisa’s nomination as Teacher of the Year is due in large part to her evolution as a Wellness teacher (Souhegan’s term for Physical Education), and her willingness to grow professionally. “My desire to be a better PE teacher felt hindered by not having or not knowing the resources available to me,” Lisa says. Encouraged by colleagues Sue Carr and Dave April, both leaders at the state level for Health and PE Education, Lisa joined the State PE Board and became certified in Physical Best, a fitness program for high school students.

Joining the NH PE Association was “the best thing to happen to me professionally,” Lisa says. “It opened my eyes to resources, and connected me with other professionals willing to share their work openly. I changed my curriculum from recreational activity to rigorous exercise.” This shift – from activity to exercise – is the backbone of Lisa’s new curriculum, which is more like a health club fitness model than a traditional PE model.

#### ***Creating a cohesive Wellness program for freshmen***

“Wellness staff at Souhegan High School see arriving freshmen as hybrids; they have some self knowledge about what motivates them to exercise and be fit, but they have many things yet to experience,” says Wellness teacher, John Dowd. Each teacher on the Wellness team brings an area of specialty, introducing students to different aspects of fitness. John Dowd focuses on learning about appropriate risk-taking and group dynamics through outdoor adventure; Dave Saxe teaches classes focused on flexibility and strength,

like Yoga and Pilates; Mike Beliveau emphasizes competition with inclusion, and recreational games for life-long enjoyment. Each of these program components compliment Lisa's Physical Best focus on fitness.

### ***Adolescent fitness linked to socialization and improved academics***

The pay-off for Lisa's commitment to continually improving her practice has been two-fold; not only has she made a fundamental shift in her approach to Physical Education, but bottom line, students become more self-aware and more fit. Lisa's goal as a teacher is for students to "make a life-long commitment to fitness, to be more intense and more creative in their goal-setting and work-outs, and to assimilate health and fitness into their social lives."

And the numbers would indicate such. Lisa's after school Speed Club continues to grow – in the past she had an inconsistent five to 10 students attend, but now there is a solid 20 - 30 that regularly come to do more performance-level fitness training.

Most significantly, students "want to use fitness socially," which Lisa says the data indicate is a huge success factor. An example of this is her "Varsity Wellness" team, which takes exercise routines from class and turns them into dance routines that Lisa says "show passion for – and a sense of humor – about fitness."

### ***Limited facilities hinder program growth***

External limitations can eat away at the potential growth and success of the program, though. "The cafeteria workers are great – they sing along, but working-out to the smell of food cooking is an issue," Lisa says. Some classes meet in hall, and the weight room safely accommodates 10 when class sizes are between 18 and 22.

"We need to invest in Wellness facilities in order to also see the improvement in academic scores. This correlation is well documented. It's why corporate facilities have Wellness facilities in their businesses. Investing in Wellness has a positive impact on the bottom line."

"In an age when schools are requiring more seat time for curriculum and people are becoming more sedentary," Lisa says, "the research shows the increased importance of exercise." When kids are sleeping better, teaching their parents the routines, and holding family contests for who can plank the longest, it's hard to argue with the successes.