

(Health and Wellness) Students' at risk as schools abandon health instruction

Written by Brandi D. Phillips

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I am passionate about developing the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of children. I have dedicated 20 years of my life to working with children in various capacities, whether it be dance, mentoring, or life skills training. Over this time, I have witnessed first hand children who are becoming less and less healthy.

This article is based on my personal opinion, observations and experiences.

Over the years, I have observed that children are becoming more and more deprived of many aspects of health and wellness in their academic education. I have been a dance teacher at a high school for the last five years and the students are increasingly unhealthy by being overweight or underweight; less intelligent and unable to write a simple paragraph. I have noticed an increase in children who self-mutilating via cutting in order to deal with the emotional pain they are experiencing; and they are less likely to express their spiritual or religious faith amongst their peers.

Included in health care reform should be the discussion of providing children with the needed health and wellness education and resources they so desperately need. If we do not address the health of our children in our nation's health care reform, we should at the very least continue to address the health of our children in our schools.

At the school where I currently teach there is not a gym for physical education, so the only fitness these students can get is either by taking Tai Chi or my dance class. These classes are taken in the school lunchroom, that triples as a theatre and dance studio. This is okay for some, but what about those students who do not choose to take either of these fitness classes? The answer is these children get nothing in the form of physical activity.

I am not saying that these children are not receiving a quality education from the staff at my school, because one of the core competencies of the school is the teaching staff that pride themselves on meeting the needs of the children with the resources and opportunities that are provided to them as professionals.

My concern is for the state and federal programs that are being cut in our schools and

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community programs.

What happened to the days when children danced in class until they perspired without complaining? Do our children still have to take the national fitness test that each child was required to do annually when we were kids in order to ensure they are progressing in terms of positive health and physical attributes? What about the peer education classes dealing with sexual health education and disease awareness? How many students have access to peer education classes dealing with mental health, self-esteem, communication and relationship building?

I remember growing up having access to Black Achievers with Major Topps, Peer Education groups at North High School with Keith Davis, the Oak Park Drill Team with John Jackson and Michael Moore. I have to give props to the sexual education groups provided by Pilot City Neighborhood Center (now called NorthPoint Health and Wellness Neighborhood Center) led by a woman named Stacy.

These programs have produced many well-rounded children based on a community and team effort- this collectivist ideology goes back to the African proverb "It's takes a village to raise a child."

In the past 10 years, since getting my Bachelor of Science degree in Family Social Science (the study of different types of families) from the University of Minnesota, I have worked with children who cut themselves to deal with emotions and cognitive processes, children who hoard, binge and steal food, as well as children who cannot write a simple paper without plagiarizing or writing in the improper format or font.

I put a call out to adults- parents, teachers, mentors, community and religious workers and other professionals, to advocate for the health and wellness of children in all areas including physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

I ask all those that care about the future of our children - who will ultimately be our primary caretakers and decision makers in our old age – to work with your state and federal lawmakers as well as your school superintendents, to find ways to continue to incorporate health and wellness services that treat the child as a whole and not just treat parts of the whole.

I think it is very important to protect and educate our children now to ensure they are able to be healthy adults and provided wise decisions to health concerns based on their knowledge and upbringing as children.

Brandi is a life skills coach, personal trainer and professional dancer, who with a passion for cultivating healthy children and sustaining healthy seniors.