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Keeping Up with America's Pioneer Consumer Group

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Whatever happened to P.E.?



By Sally Greenberg, NCL Executive Director

As a kid I participated in the President's Council on Physical Fitness. What did that mean? Well, my classmates and I were required to run the 50-yard-dash (I remember running past my gym teacher who stood with a whistle around her neck and a stopwatch in her hand – my time was disappointing), do a certain number of sit-ups (I surpassed my own expectations) and pull-ups (I could only do the girl version that allowed you to lean back with the pull up bar in front of you) and I can't remember what else but the point was, the President thought our physical fitness was important and as a result, so did we.

[Things are different today](#), according to the new CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) biennial report. There's no more expectation from the highest office for the nation's youth to be physically fit.

Nearly half of all high school students take no physical education classes. In California, while state regs say that elementary students must get at least 20 minutes of exercise a day, only 20 percent of schools are complying. At many schools, there is no gymnasium, and no gym teacher, and thus no opportunity for exercise. In New York, K-3 students are supposed to get phys ed class every day, three times a week for grades 4-6, and 90 minutes a week for 7 and 8th graders. But none of the schools that were audited for the report were complying with this regimen.

What has happened to the focus on physical education that came with the imprimatur of the President of the United States? Principals blame budget cuts and the need to prepare students for tests, but also a lack of attention to phys ed from the Department of Education as well as school boards and superintendents.

It seems like a disconnect to me. First lady Michelle Obama has championed her "Let's Move" campaign, introducing dance and exercise into schools and the kids love it – dance and music is a really fun way to get exercise. The President should revive the Council on Physical Fitness and make it fun, blending it with Michelle's Let's Move program and bringing in classes like power dance, yoga, pilates, and zoomba.

Harvard professor John Ratey, author of "Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain," says physical education helps promote better academic outcomes, but that phys ed teachers are fighting to hold onto their jobs and that it is dawning on educators that we've "missed the boat." We're facing ever-growing obesity among our nation's youth; this CDC report is a wake-up call and a great opportunity for the President to step up and

re-brand – Obama-style – what was once a priority for the American President: physical fitness.

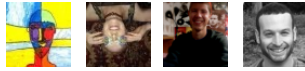
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- [April 2011](#)
- [March 2011](#)
- [February 2011](#)
- [January 2011](#)
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- [August 2010](#)
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- [June 2009](#)
- [May 2009](#)
- [April 2009](#)
- [March 2009](#)
- [February 2009](#)
- [January 2009](#)
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