



**Shape Up SF PE Advocates** brought Darin Curtis to San Francisco on August 25, 2011 to speak to a group of teachers, parents, and concerned community residents at Sports Basement, Bryant St. to talk about how he infuses the love of physical education and physical activity into the lives of his students. Darin is the 2011 California Teacher of the Year, a PE teacher from San Diego's at Tierra del Sol Middle School. During his visit, we were fortunate to schedule an interview with Carol Kocivar, California PTA president, and host of KALW's *Looking at Education*, that airs the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 6pm, before the SFUSD Board of Education meetings. This interview was aired on September 27, 2011.

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**KOCIVAR:** This is Carol Kocivar, *Looking at Education* on KALW, and joining me is Darin Curtis, who is the 2011 CA Teacher of the Year. Math teacher? English Teacher? Science teacher? Darin, what kind of teacher are you?

**CURTIS:** Physical Education.

**KOCIVAR:** HA! I love it. Do a lot of people say – teacher of the year, physical education? Is that strange?

**CURTIS:** It is, they don't say it to my face, necessarily but I'm sure it's a thought that it's a PE teacher that is the one that is representing all the teachers in CA. But there's a lot of lessons learned to be learned in PE that we can apply in the classroom. And really teachers everywhere need to be teaching physical education, not just the physical education teachers.

**KOCIVAR:** And you have I think, some really, wonderful stories about how all youngsters can be involved in physical education. I know that you had one student that really stands out and sometimes, you know you'll ask a teacher, "Who was that greatest student I ever had?" Was it that guy who now plays quarterback professionally or plays basketball? But who was your – and *still* is your most inspiring student?

**CURTIS:** Without a doubt his name was Tyler, and he came to me with muscular dystrophy and still has it. He's been in a wheelchair his entire life. And coming to me in 8<sup>th</sup> grade he said "Coach, I want to play." And I said I don't know how to help you in that regards, I can modify the games and get you involved, but I said maybe there's more that you bring to the table that the rest of us don't. He has a muscular dystrophy walk and I said let's get the school doing what you do. And so we had the entire school – we had 300 students raise about \$7000 and went for his walk, Stride and Ride, muscular dystrophy around the bay down in San Diego, and we took a bus down there for the kids who needed rides, and joined him in his efforts to raise money for muscular dystrophy and awareness. And really what it did was it brought the school together. It introduced the kids to a student who they may not have known before, or certainly not know the extent of what he is facing every day. And he today, he was down on the field for the preseason of the Charger game, meeting Norv Turner & getting a football because they found out he wants to be a coach. And he's the water boy for the high school football team and knows the plays better than everybody. He's the assistant coach on the basketball team and he's never taken a step in his life. But yet he can motivate others just to do their best, and that's really what all teachers need to be doing in the classroom, and he did that for me.



**KOCIVAR:** And motivation – we talk a lot about the hard subjects that kids learn. That they may learn a specific skill but you’re talking about character skills, aren’t you? And that’s one of the things that is particularly important when you teach physical education.

**CURTIS:** Oh absolutely – it’s not, how good you are, it’s how hard you are working to get better - at every level for the rest of your life. You need healthy habits. And it starts with our education of our students and their eating habits, and their fitness habits. But it carries over to the classroom. Because if we only focus on the academic side, or focus on their weaknesses, then a lot of times you miss what’s going to make a student shine. And a lot of students come to PE because they really enjoy it, and it gets them involved in school. And a lot of students come to PE and really need it and don’t enjoy it. And we need to make it to where those students feel accepted there that just as all students are accepted in the classroom.

**KOCIVAR:** So as a physical education teacher, what are some of the skills and strategies that you would have that you’d like to share with other teachers to help them sort of strengthen their game?

**CURTIS:** Well as a physical education teacher, you better be “with it.” And by “with it” I mean you have usually 50 students or more in a class, and you need to get them moving. If you try to stand in the way of their energy and their enthusiasm, you’re going to get run over. And by channeling their energy you get further with it. I like to use the analogy of a dog sled driver. If I stand in front of the dog sled team, we go nowhere. We tangle up the leashes while the dogs are ready to run, waiting for the slowest dog to get on board. I really believe we need to let the fast dogs go and everybody follow in. and then pick up the pieces of the ones that need encouraging or the ones that need help or extra attention, or have issues that need to be addressed or modified programs, but to stand in front of everybody and deliver the instruction, you’re taking away from the activity time, you’re taking away from the enthusiasm that they bring to the table, and you end up causing more problems than you actually are resolving.

**KOCIVAR:** Let me just remind you, this is Carol Kocivar, *Looking at Education* on KALW, and speaking with me is Darin Curtis, who is the 2011 CA teacher of the year. Now Darin’s a PE teacher and Darin we talked a little bit about some of the students, the sort of inspiration as opposed to perspiration in physical education. And now can we talk about what are those things that happen in PE that may really help a youngster in all areas of development?

**CURTIS:** Oh when a student is able to overcome a physical challenge or an obstacle that’s placed in front of them, achieve something they never thought they could do, that they can change their body fat percentage, or they add muscle, or they gain stamina –

**KOCIVAR:** Can you tell me, I want to change my body fat percentage –

**CURTIS:** You walk out of that classroom, or you would walk out of the gym as an adult feeling so good about yourself that you put that time and energy in and when kids come to my class – if they leave my class not wanting to exercise anymore, then I haven’t done my job. It doesn’t matter where they’re at physically – it’s that mentally, do they leave the class wanting to continue what I’ve started with them, or the program that they’re on? And a lot of that is focused on where they’re at by taking baseline



benchmarks/scores for them, and setting personal goals to try to achieve. And really focus on how to make every student reach their best. Not every student is going to be a great runner, but all students can become good exercisers. And, once they realize they're not racing against other people – you're putting time in for your own well-being, then it kind of changes the reason they come to class. They look forward to that opportunity – that 45 minutes to an hour everyday of engaging in the classroom. And in my class, and I think in all classes - homework. They need to be active at home. Whether it's healthy eating habits, whether it's being active in an organized sport, or it's finding time to set aside in their day to exercise on their own.

**KOCIVAR:** Now Darin, I know you were one of the highlights of the California State PTA convention speaking about PE and you just said something that sometimes parents don't make that connection, and that is the importance of homework. And when you talk about homework, you're not talking about someone coming in and filling in paperwork. You're talking about homework in terms of physical activity and Nutrition.

**CURTIS:** Yeah I think homework really needs to be addressed as a global issue in education in that what's the purpose of it? The purpose of it is to create habits that carry on with them forever. And nothing is more important, or less important, than their future health. Nothing is going to be an indicator of future happiness than whether they're going to lead a healthy, happy, fit life. And by exercising regularly, eating healthy, it starts at school with educating – what is healthy eating? What is good exercise habits? But then it's followed up at home. And that parents need to be aware and brought on board that - how can I help my student's progress? And today the obesity rate in America – nearly 20% of our students are obese and 50% of them are overweight. And it's something that is a cultural phenomenon and it's getting worse with the advent of technology taking off. Some of these kids never get off the couch for a single minute at home. So it's important that parents realize the importance of it.

**KOCIVAR:** So give me some homework. I'm a mom, I'm a working mom, I'm very busy, I get home and I'm tired. What should I be doing to encourage my child to be active?

**CURTIS:** The best thing is to be active together. If you tell a child to go take the trash out, they'll drag their feet if they get around to it, but if you take the trash out with them, then they're on board with it. It's the same thing with exercising. If you tell them to go out and run around the neighborhood, they're not going to be exercising. They're going to be running around the neighborhood doing other things. You have to model good behaviors. So getting parents on board - in my class, they're rewarded if they bring others on board – whether it's their parents or friends that they get to exercise with them because it's really a social stigma that's attached to your behaviors, and if you break that down with your friends, then all of a sudden, it's acceptable. It's okay to exercise; it's okay to be riding my bike around in the park. If they recognize that, that's their homework in my class. But getting parents on board is half the battle.



**KOCIVAR:** So another thing that you said – it’s a little bit of a social thing because it does give parents who are very busy an opportunity to spend time with their children, and to see them and talk to them and see how things are going.

**CURTIS:** Oh absolutely. I’m in the same boat where I’m running kids around, and dinner is wherever we can get it or make it at the last minute. Sit down after dinner and you go in separate rooms and turn on separate electronic devices, and that’s the end of it. But go for a walk. It only takes a half an hour, your food digests better, your conversation - you’ll come back a different family. If that becomes part of a habit, then the kids will carry on with that, on their own. But if you don’t make that, you can’t expect children to make that a habit. And same in the classroom – if teachers don’t model good physical education practices, then your students won’t model it either.

**KOCIVAR:** Right and you’re not just talking about signing up a youngster for a football league or a soccer league and sending them off, hoping someone else does it for them, you’re talking about something a lot more collaborative.

**CURTIS:** Oh absolutely – the benefits of getting children involved in sports and athletics is tremendous, but that’s not the end all. Really - It’s a family thing. If mom sends the kid off and isn’t active and involved, then the child when he’s done isn’t going to live with a life of activity. So I think it’s important that the parents model that behavior with their children. But getting them involved certainly has its advantages, and really for a lot of kids, that’s the reason that they get up in the morning – that football practice, or that baseball game, or that soccer –

**KOCIVAR:** Well, being the mom of kids who had to get up at 5 o’clock in the morning to go to row in the middle of the night, I know what it’s like.

**CURTIS:** Yeah, and really, what activities can you carry on the rest of your life? Something like rowing, you can be involved in clubs, paddling clubs, and the like. And continue on with that as a lifestyle. Football? Maybe not so much, but the idea of getting involved and being active is something that all kids can look for, but it starts with the environment in the home, that it’s encouraged.

**KOCIVAR:** So just one more question before we leave. If you were talking to any teacher what would be the one thing you would say about the importance of exercise?

**CURTIS:** If limited to one thing, I would say is that all kids need it, all kids need to know that it’s important, all kids need the opportunity to play, they need the opportunity to be involved, and it’s not measured by their fitness standards, it’s not measured by how fast they are – it’s measured by their engagement and enthusiasm for the activity. And carry that over, to fill in the blank for what that activity is, they’ll lead a healthier happier life if they’re able to engage at a wedding in the dancing that’s going on, if they’re at the beach, and they’re engaged in a volleyball game with their family, if they’re engaged in bike rides with their friends or whatever it is. Enthusiasm has to be brought forth to create an environment where everybody has the opportunity to feel good about themselves because they did something. I mean that’s a hard thing to do but I would say to create the opportunity for kids to have fun.



Darin Curtis Interview by Carol Kocivar  
*Looking at Education* on KALW

**KOCIVAR:** Great! I'd really like to thank Darin Curtis, ca teacher of the year 2011 for joining me. This is Carol Kocivar, *Looking at Education*, on KALW.