



The Key to Ending Chronic Disease?

Invest in the next generation

By *Lauren Del Sarto*

How do we reverse the chronic disease epidemic plaguing our country? Indio High teacher, Jason Tate, says to start with the next generation. He knows the value first hand. Over the past ten years, he has been teaching the biology of nutrition and recently created a Health & Wellness Academy at Indio High where pre-med students are learning about health care with functional medicine at its core. Many of the near 300 kids that take part consider his classes more impactful than any other.

Tate hopes to see this imperative life-skill education in every high school in America and has formed the Human Health Initiative, Inc. (HHI), a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization providing curriculum based on nutrition education, movement and exercise, and mind-body skills. Its mission is to prevent and reverse dietary and lifestyle related diseases worldwide through education and awareness.

Tate has established an executive board of medical professionals, educators, and health and wellness entrepreneurs who will create engaging, relevant and hands-on curriculum to be delivered through online licensing to schools nationwide. Training conferences and seminars for educators will also take place.

"In 2017, 3.3 million kids will graduate from high school with little to no knowledge of how food affects the body, or even how to cook," says Tate who calls the current state requirements for health courses nationally "abysmal." "There are some states that require zero PE and zero health education. California requires two units, but they don't police it; even in our valley, health class is no longer offered in our local high schools.

Much of the proposed curriculum for HHI comes from Tate's own success with students. Seven years ago, the science teacher developed the *Physiology of Digestion* course to help kids understand how the food

they eat affects their body. The program has grown to include cooking workshops, lessons on gut microbiome, meditation, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, and Yoga. He incorporated the latter to address the stress he saw his kids experiencing and to further engage them in the classroom. "A keystone to all of this is mental health. You can have all the information and knowledge in the world, but if you are dealing with depression, anxiety, or stress, all of that is out the window."

The Human Health Initiative's three foundational core elements are:

Nutrition Education. The elements of nutrition include anatomy/physiology, cultural cooking, and growing food. Tate feels that all kids should learn the physiology of the body, because if you know how it works, you'll be better informed on how to fix it when it doesn't. Tate says his students compare his classes on microbiome to astronomy and are completely engaged.

In their cooking workshops, students cook a dish, learn the culture behind it, and present their experience in class. "They are fearful at first and then the kids fall in love with cooking, which is an imperative life skill for good health. They share how they messed up the first time, so they cooked it again, and then their family ate it, so they had to start over."

"Kids don't know that healthy food can be delicious and that it can make them feel good, and if we can teach them the 'why' and show them the 'how' they will share that knowledge and skill with their families."

Through the growing food portion of the curriculum, students start to understand the value of community factors like soil health and clean air and water.

Movement & Exercise. Another valuable element to the program is teaching the importance of movement and exercise. "In a 90-minute class, we incorporate a movement



break such as standing yoga or Tai Chi, or if we notice the kids are fading, we play a brief exercise game and it brings them right back.” The online program will provide teachers with videos on movement practices so they can participate with the students but don’t have to know the practice themselves.

Mind-Body Skills. Tate has completed the advanced mind-body medicine training offered by the Center for Mind-Body Medicine which teaches the physiology of stress and using mind-body practices to address behavioral health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression.

When he began teaching meditation and guided visualization in his class, the kids were uncomfortable with the concept; now, they ask for it. “I see kids from all backgrounds under so much stress; you can see it in their face. Some have issues at home, but many more have overwhelming school work and schedules.” Through his class, they have learned to use meditation as a coping method. “It doesn’t have a sedative effect; it has a calming effect,” says Tate. “It completely changes, not only how the kids work, but how they work with their teacher; they feel safe and they trust you, and so they will learn from you.”

Under the HHI, the curriculum will be repurposed so that any science or health credentialed teacher can conduct the program. They plan to hold workshops and trainings worldwide in an effort to find or create science educators who can lead classes on living wellness with a similar passion as Tate. “It takes a special teacher, but they are out there, and we will find them.”

The magnitude of the initiative is quite ambitious, but Tate and his team are ready. They understand the impact it can have on the future of our country’s health.

“If we can start graduating three million kids a year with knowledge of their body and how to prevent chronic diseases; to notice when they have signs of metabolic syndrome or other chronic diseases and how to reverse it through lifestyle factors, then we can start turning things around. Giving the next generation those tools is the key.”

The Human Health Initiative will hold an informational reception and fundraiser on May 20 in Palm Desert. For more information, contact Jason Tate at jason@humanhealthinitiative.org or visit www.HumanHealthInitiative.org.