Physical Activity Enhances Learning

Moving and thinking are connected
The largest area of the brain is the cerebrum, which is the thinking part of the brain, but it also has an area that controls the voluntary muscles.¹

The cerebellum is an area of the brain commonly linked to performance school students walked for 20 minutes of movement that single bouts of exercise improve balance, movement and coordination, and plays a role in thinking.²

Physical activity is necessary for efficient brain functioning²
When a person is active, the number of breaths taken each minute increases and breathing becomes deeper. Blood, now rich with oxygen, moves through the system more quickly. This increase in oxygen to the brain increases focus and concentration. When one is sitting for a long period of time:

- Blood pools in the hip area
- Breathing becomes shallow and slow
- Less oxygen enters the blood stream, thus less blood reaches the brain

Brain function is less efficient after long periods of sitting, and as a result, one’s learning and performance can suffer. In addition, under these conditions it is increasingly difficult to collect and remember additional information. The hippocampus, which receives and temporarily stores all explicit information, shuts down when it receives too much information.³

To optimize learning, combine a 20-minute learning segment with 2-5 minutes of movement.⁴

Physical activity maximizes brain functioning:
- Exercise prepares the brain to receive and retain additional information.²
- Movement stimulates growth and greater connections between nerve cells.⁵
- In a recent study, 10 elementary school students walked for 20 minutes while another 10 sat quietly. Then, all 20 students took the same test. Conclusions indicate a single bout of moderately intense aerobic exercise (e.g. walking) improves the cognitive control of attention as a contributing factor for increasing attention and academic performance. These data suggest that single bouts of exercise may be necessary for effective functioning across the lifespan (see above brain scan image).⁶

“One of the best ways to maximize the brain is through exercise and movement,”
- Dr. John Ratey, renowned brain researcher⁷

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School-Based Physical Activity Provides Health and Learning Benefits

Health Benefits:
Studies demonstrate that physical activity in schools is associated with increased:
- Energy use or expenditure of calories8,9,10
- Flexibility11,12
- Muscular Endurance12,13
- Knowledge about exercise, nutrition, and fitness11
- Participation in physical activity outside of school9

Classroom Behavior Benefits:
Physical activity has been associated with better classroom behavior, which facilitates an optimal classroom environment.14

Physical activity improves student behavior.
- Providing recess to 8- to 9-year-old students is associated with better teacher ratings of class behavior scores.15
- Eight of eight studies found one or more positive associations between recess and indicators of student cognitive skills, attitudes, and academic behavior including attention, concentration, and/or on-task classroom behavior.16
- Exercise affects mood, vitality, alertness, and feelings of well-being.17

Learning Benefits:
Research studies found increasing physical activity improves classroom behavior, concentration, time on task, and academic achievement.15,21-26

There is a strong positive relationship between physical fitness and the academic achievement of students.19,20
- Physical fitness may enhance academic achievement of children by improving their attention and memory skills.18,19
- Students passing all health-related fitness tests tend to score higher on academic achievement tests.20

Providing more opportunity for increased physical activity during the school day does not lead to a decrease in academic test scores and may even result an increase in test scores.21,22,26,27

- Increasing physical activity in school
  ✓ Improves academic achievement21,22
  ✓ Improves classroom behavior23
  ✓ Increases concentration24
  ✓ Increases time on task15,21,23,25,26

17 Lawrence J. Train Your Brain With Exercise: Not only is exercise smart for your heart and weight, but it can make you smarter and better at what you do. WebMD Feature, July/26, 2003. Available at: http://my.webmd.com/content/article/67/79909.htm. Accessed June 22
THE CHALLENGE
The SHAPE fitness assessment results for 2013-2014:
• Only 19% of Georgia students were able to achieve the Healthy Fitness Zone (HFZ) for all five FitnessGram® assessments.
• 24% of Georgia students were unable to achieve the HFZ for any of the FitnessGram® assessments.

THE SOLUTION
The CDC recommends children get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. Schools can help achieve this goal by promoting a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP), which includes:
• Classroom integration
• Recess
• Before and after school activity
• Quality physical education
• Staff engagement
• Family/community engagement

BEING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE IN SCHOOL
✓ Improves academic scores (reading, math, spelling and composite).  
✓ Improves classroom behavior.  
✓ Increases concentration.  
✓ Increases time on task.  
✓ Reduces risk of depression.  
✓ Improves cardiovascular fitness and muscular strength.  
✓ Reduces likelihood for developing many diseases (e.g. type II diabetes).  

DURING SCHOOL
Classroom Integration
• Provide physical activity breaks between subjects, or use it to teach academic concepts and skills.
• Eight out of nine studies found positive associations between classroom-based physical activity and indicators of academic performance (increased time on task, reduced fidgeting, improved concentration and improved reading, math, spelling and composite scores).

Recess
• Active recess for at least 20 minutes can improve academic performance.  
• Eight of eight studies found one or more positive associations between recess and indicators of student cognitive skills, attitudes and academic behavior including attention, concentration and/or on-task classroom behavior.  
• One study found that fourth-grade students who participated in directed physical activity during recess (stretching and aerobic walking) had significantly higher concentration scores after recess than those students who sat quietly in the library during recess.

Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP) Model
Children need at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day for better health and school success. Through the CSPAP Model, schools can increase physical activity without compromising academic achievement. In fact, a number of research studies found increasing physical activity improved classroom behavior, time on task and academic achievement.
After the implementation of a 5th grade morning physical activity program, Yargo Elementary School’s 5th grade students had a ten-lap increase in PACER scores and an increase in CRCT scores for 4 out of 5 subject areas. 12

**QUALITY PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

- The goal of physical education is to develop physically educated individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of physical activity. 6
- A review by the CDC found that in eleven of fourteen studies there were one or more positive associations between physical education and indicators of cognitive skills and attitudes, academic behavior and/or academic achievement. 3

"Teachers are powerful role models for students. In a recent survey of over 200 teachers participating in a HealthMPowers’ staff wellness program, 80% reported exercising more and 48% increased the amount of physical activity they provided for students."

- Christi Kay, HealthMPowers President

**STAFF ENGAGEMENT**

Employees participating in worksite wellness programs benefit from:
- Increased wellbeing, self-image and self-esteem 10
- Improved stress-coping skills 10
- Improved health status 10
- Lower out-of-pocket healthcare costs 10
- Increased job satisfaction 10
- Safer and more supportive work environment 10

**FAMILY and COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

- One study indicates family support and parent modeling of exercise are linked to physical activity in children. 11

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References:


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Integrating physical activity into the classroom can help improve concentration, behavior and academic performance. This integration can act as an efficient transition between subjects, an energy booster or as a method of teaching/reinforcing academic concepts.

Regular physical activity is not only important for health, but it also enhances student learning.

Classroom physical activities were reported to be fun, easy to do and did not interfere with learning as shown by higher test scores than in a control group.

Classroom physical activity positively affects behavior and academic scores

- Eight out of nine studies found positive associations between classroom-based physical activity and indicators of academic performance (increased time on task, reduced fidgeting, improved concentration and improved reading, math, spelling and composite scores).

Physical activity prepares the brain to learn

- In an active student, oxygen-rich blood rapidly moves through the body. This movement stimulates growth and greater connections between nerve cells.
- In-class physical activity breaks can be integrated into subject areas or provided as transition from one subject to another. They can last between 5–20 minutes and occur all at one time or several times throughout the day.
- Even a short break from focused concentration allows the brain to consolidate information for improved retention, retrieval of memory and to benefit to benefit cognitive development.
Ideas for integrating physical activity into the classroom

- **Brain Boosters:** Use physical activity to help students *expand excess energy* and focus on learning!

  **Try this!** *Cardio*— Assign a physical activity to each suit in a deck of cards (e.g., jumps for spades, push-ups for hearts, sit-ups for diamonds, jumping jacks for clubs). Draw this key on the board. Throughout the day, pick up the top card from the deck. Students perform the corresponding physical activity the number of times written on the card (face cards=15 reps).

- **Activities for Review:** Use physical activity to *practice/review* an academic concept!

  **Try this!** *Multiple Choice Review*— Ask your class a review question. Students jump if they think the answer is A, do a push-up if they think the answer is B, run in place if they think the answer is C and pretend to kick a soccer ball if they think the answer is D.

- **Academic Accelerators:** Use physical activity to *teach a new academic concept* within a core curriculum area!

  **Third Grade Core Curriculum** — CC3.MD.4

  Generate measurement data by measuring lengths using rulers marked with halves and fourths of an inch. Show the data by making a line plot, where the horizontal scale is marked off in appropriate units— whole numbers, halves or quarters.

  Integrate physical activity into Core Curriculum

  Students generate measurement data by performing the long jump and measuring their distance with a yardstick. When the student jumps, his/her partner measures the jump to the nearest inch, half-inch and quarter inch. Plot all jumps on a graph.

  **Note:** Be sure to establish safety precautions and modifications so all students can participate

  ✓ Ensure adequate space is available  ✓ Modify activities to include all students

  ✓ Consider all safety hazards in the classroom  ✓ If possible, teacher participates in activity with students

**No Cost/Low Cost Classroom Resources:**

**Power Up for 30 Resource Guide**

http://healthmpowers.org/school-login/power-up-for-30/resource-guide/

Password: powerup30ga

Click on the **Classroom** category to find resources

For more information, contact us at
info@healthmpowers.org
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www.healthmpowers.org

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Before and after school programs provide excellent opportunities for students to increase physical activity outside of the regular school day.

These programs typically are conducted within the school setting or in combination with a community program.

It is recommended that before and after school programs allocate at least 20% of their time to physical activity\(^7\) with at least half of this time being devoted to moderate to vigorous physical activity.

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**BEFORE/ AFTER SCHOOL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

- Yargo Elementary School’s Physical Education teacher created a morning physical activity program for 5th grade students in response to her school’s eye-opening fall semester Fitnessgram results. A result, the average 5th grade student showed a ten-lap increase in PACER scores and increased their CRCT scores in 4 of 5 subject areas (Reading, English/Language Arts, Math and Social Studies) from the previous year.\(^8\)
- Approximately 280 out of 557 surveyed teachers reported students participating in the BOKS before school program as having improvements in readiness to learn, ability to concentrate, ability to control impulses and engagement in class discussions.\(^9\)

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**THE CHALLENGE**

The SHAPE fitness assessment results for 2013-2014:

- Only 19% of Georgia students were able to achieve the Healthy Fitness Zone (HFZ) for all five FitnessGram® assessments\(^1\)
- 24% of Georgia students were unable to achieve the HFZ for any of the FitnessGram® assessments\(^4\)

**THE SOLUTION**

The CDC recommends children get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.\(^2\)

Schools can help achieve this goal by promoting a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP), which includes:

- Classroom integration
- Recess
- Before and after school activity
- Quality physical education
- Staff engagement
- Family/community engagement

**BEING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE IN SCHOOL**

- Improves academic scores (reading, math, spelling and composite)\(^3\)
- Improves classroom behavior\(^4,6\)
- Increases concentration\(^4,6\)
- Increases time on task\(^4,6\)
- Reduces risk of depression\(^3\)
- Improves cardiovascular fitness and muscular strength\(^3\)
- Reduces likelihood for developing many diseases (e.g. type II diabetes)\(^3\)

---

**EARLY MORNING PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES**

**FACILITY JOINT-USE AGREEMENT**

**ACTIVE TRANSPORT TO AND FROM SCHOOL**

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**BEFORE/ AFTER SCHOOL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY POSITIVELY AFFECTS STUDENT FITNESS, ACADEMICS, AND CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR**

- According to one study, providing ADHD students with 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity before school improved school day social and behavioral functioning as noted by daily teacher ratings.\(^8\)
- 75% of surveyed teachers reported students are more confident and happier following participation in the Build Our Kids’ Success (BOKS) before school program.\(^9\)
Best Practices for Before/After School Physical Activity Program

- Dedicate at least 20% of the time in the before/after school program to physical activity.\(^{11}\)
- Offer organized and structured activities to increase time doing moderate to vigorous physical activity.\(^{12}\)
- Add structural physical activity including movements requiring bilateral cross-body movements at moderate to vigorous levels to maximize neural benefits of concentration and time on task.\(^{13}\)
- Offer as a stand-alone program or in conjunction with a larger extracurricular or enrichment program.\(^{14}\)
- Train before/after school program employees on facilitating physical activity.\(^{15}\)
- Use outdoor space when weather permits.

No Cost/Low Cost Before/After School Resources:

**Power Up for 30 Resource Guide**

http://healthmpowers.org/school-login/power-up-for-30/resource-guide/

Password: powerup30ga

Click on the **Before/After School** category to find resources
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School boards, superintendents, principals and teachers feel confident that providing recess to students benefits academic behaviors, facilitates social development and contributes to overall physical activity and its associated benefits.

RECESS FULFILLS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN STUDENTS’ SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

- Recess facilitates improvements in sharing, communicating, problem solving and respecting rules, which are important lifetime skills to learn and practice.

Recess positively affects classroom behavior and improves concentration, attention and time on-task.

- Out of eight relevant studies, all found one or more positive associations between recess and indicators of student cognitive skills, attitudes and academic behavior including attention, concentration and/or on-task classroom behavior.
- Recess prepares students to learn. Teachers in schools using Playworks, a program that enhances the recess experience, reported spending significantly less time to transition from recess to learning activities (34% fewer minutes).

RECESS PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR.

Time allotted to recess in school has declined by 20% since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Only 9 states (18%) require elementary schools to provide students with recess.
Recess Recommendations

- Ensure all students engage in at least one recess period each day for 20 minutes or more.
- Offer unstructured play opportunities for all students.
- Use outdoor space when weather permits.
- Provide a safe environment with developmentally appropriate equipment for all students.
- Ensure qualified adults supervise recess.
- Teach and consistently enforce 3-6 recess safety rules.
- Do not tolerate bullying or aggressive behavior.
- Do not allow recess to replace physical education.
- Do not withhold recess to make up classwork.
- Do not schedule recess before or after physical education.
- Create and enforce policy against recess being used as a reward or punishment.

Simple ways to increase student physical activity during recess

- Provide inexpensive playground equipment (e.g., jump ropes, balls, hula-hoops, Frisbees, etc.)
- Collaborate with local businesses or civic organizations that may be willing to paint playground surfaces/donate equipment.
- Train recess supervisors to teach new games and interact with students to increase physical activity.
- Designate a physical activity director to maximize promotion of physical activity within your school.

No Cost/Low Cost Recess Resources:

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Password: powerup30ga

Click on the Recess category to find resources
Physical education can positively improve classroom behavior and academic scores.

- Studies have found that physical education is conducive to improved attention spans/concentration, self-concept, impulse control, perceptions of intellectual or academic competence; as well as other cognitive skills, attitudes and academic achievement (math/language arts). 3
- As cardiovascular fitness level increases, so does academic achievement. 4,8-10 One study suggests that students in the FITNESSGRAM “Healthy Fitness Zone” (HFZ) are two to four times more likely to meet or exceed the Illinois Standardized Achievement Test (ISAT) reading and math requirements than students who are not. 4
- Eleven out of fourteen studies found one or more positive associations between physical education and indicators of cognitive skills and attitudes, behavior and/or academic achievement. 3

Parents support physical education, but most schools do not meet the national recommendation.

- 63% of elementary schools require physical education. 10
- Only 3.8% of elementary schools provide the nationally recommended daily physical education for the entire school year for all grades in the school. 2
- More than 90% of surveyed parents expressed a desire for more physical education in schools. 7

Quality Physical Education = 150 minutes per week

Focus on physical competencies, not winning

 Spend 50% or more class time doing MVPA

Fewer lines = More play time

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Quality Physical Education focuses on health-related fitness, physical competencies and creating a positive attitude about physical activity.

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In a national survey, 51% of teachers reported gaining weight after entering the career-field. The top contributors to their weight gain were sedentary roles and time constraints that lead to unhealthy behaviors that make it difficult to stay fit. A school wellness program supports healthy behaviors and improves health outcomes of staff. These programs can focus on general health education, health coaching, weight management, health fairs, medical screenings, on-site fitness opportunities and more.

Physical Activity Opportunities for Staff Engagement

- **Before/After School Exercise Videos**
- **Exercise with Students**
- **Before/After School Walking Club**
- **Walk and Talks (Faculty Meetings/Planning Time)**
- **School-Wide Fun Run/Walk**
- **Dancing with Teacher Fundraiser**

Physical activity is a cost-effective way to support educators and their health, improve job satisfaction and provide positive role models for students.

The entire school benefits from staff engagement in physical activity.

**Employee benefits:**
- Increased wellbeing, self-image and self-esteem
- Improved coping skills for stress and other factors affecting health
- Improved health status
- Lower out-of-pocket costs for healthcare services (e.g., reduced premiums and deductibles)
- Increased access to health promotion resources and social support
- Improved job satisfaction
- Safer and more supportive work environment

**Employer benefits:**
- Lower health care and disability costs
- Enhance employee productivity
- Decrease employee absenteeism
- Decrease rates of illnesses and injuries
- Improved employee morale
- Improved employee recruitment and retention
- Increased organizational commitment and creation of a culture of health
Evidence suggests worksite wellness programs provide benefits to the employer, the school employee and the students they teach.©

Developing a Worksite Wellness Program at your school

1. Assess the Need®
   • Assess types of physical activity that interest your staff, staff availability and available free/low-cost resources (e.g. funding, equipment, personnel expertise)
   • Sample staff wellness assessments:
     ○ http://cymcdn.com/sites/dhpe-siteym.com/resource/group/75a95e00-448d-41c5-8226-0d20f29787de/Downloadable_Materials/InterestHabits1.pdf
     ○ http://cymcdn.com/sites/dhpe-siteym.com/resource/group/75a95e00-448d-41c5-8226-0d20f29787de/Downloadable_Materials/InterestHabits5.pdf

2. Plan the Program®
   • Use assessment results to plan program
   • Selected 1-2 component(s) that suit the employee population and available resources
   • Establish a timeline
   • Communicate program details to all employees (newsletters, flyers, emails, staff meetings, etc.)
   • Sample letters:
     ○ http://www.pasco.k12.fl.us/benefits/wellness/
     ○ (pg. 34) http://cymcdn.com/sites/dhpe-siteym.com/resource/group/75a95e00-448d-41c5-8226-0d20f29787de/Downloadable_Materials/EntireGuide.pdf

3. Implement the Program®

   Sample activities (website and pages):
   • Getting Started
     ○ Brown Bag Lunch Sessions (pgs. 37-38)
     ○ Activity Breaks (pgs. 39-42)
     ○ Individual Goal Setting (pg. 43)
   • Building Momentum
     ○ Partner with Local Fitness Center (pg. 45)
     ○ Healthy Stairwells (pgs. 46-47)
     ○ Promote Local Walking Paths (pg. 49)
   • Moving Forward
     ○ Sponsor Walk/Run (pg. 51)
     ○ Walk and Talk Meetings (pg. 52)
     ○ Wellness Exam (pgs. 53-54)
     ○ Physical Activity Coaching (pgs. 55-56)
   • Keeping the Pace
     ○ Employee Walking Club (pgs. 58-59)
     ○ Partner with Your Community (pg. 60)
     ○ Safe Walking Routes (pgs. 61-63)

4. Determine Impact through Evaluation
   • Periodically re-administer needs assessment to staff, consolidate results, determine effectiveness of intervention(s) and plan follow-up interventions.
   • Report achievements to school board, administration, staff, PTA/PTO and local media
   • Modify intervention(s) in response to staff feedback

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- Increases concentration4,6
- Increases time on task4,6
- Reduces risk of depression3
- Improves cardiovascular fitness and muscular strength3
- Reduces likelihood for developing many diseases (e.g. type II diabetes)3

Parental support is an important predictor of children’s physical activity.

- One study indicates that family support and parent modeling of exercise are linked to physical activity in children.7

Families supporting their children’s physical activity can lead to early adoption of a physically active lifestyle.

School staff can reach out to engage families in their children’s physical activity and physical education.6,7

Schools and community organizations can team up to increases access to physical activity resources for students and families.

Engage Parents as Volunteers…

Before/After School Program Volunteers

Classroom Leaders

Recess Monitors

Schools and families can collaborate to offer physical activity opportunities to improve the health of students, their families and the culture of an entire community.

Schools are the perfect place to connect students, families, educators and the community through physical activity.

- In 2011, 55% of schools nationwide conducted or planned events in which families were invited to engage in physical activities with students.8
- 39% of schools nationwide made their gymnasiums available for open use by students or community members before or after school, and 68% of schools nationwide made their playgrounds available for open use.9
Parents can improve their child’s health by modeling and supporting physical activity.

Parents can increase their child’s physical activity behavior by:
- Actively playing with their child
- Encouraging their child’s performance in physical activity
- Enrolling their child in physical activity programs
- Providing transportation to parks and other activity related facilities
- Teaching their child how to play active games and sports

Benefits of exercising as a family:
- Increased wellbeing, self-image and self-esteem
- Stronger bones and muscles
- Increased lean body mass
- Decreased risk of heart disease and diabetes
- Lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Stronger emotional bonds
- Improved sleep
- Improved ability to handle physical and emotional stress

No Cost/Low Cost Family/Community Engagement Resources:

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**Jigsaw**

**Directions:** Write down important ideas about your article and from the discussion.

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