

New Evidence: Want Better Academic Results? Focus on Increasing Physical Activity!

P.E. Has Transformational Value for Students

SILVER SPRING, MD - February 4, 2015 - If we want our students' minds to work efficiently in the classroom, then we must jumpstart their bodies in the gym. That's the major takeaway from a recent study—The Relation of Childhood Physical Activity to Brain Health, Cognition and Scholastic Achievement. Many of the findings of the report were published in a recent edition of Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development.

“Evidence has suggested that short bouts of physical activity (i.e., 20 minutes of walking on a treadmill) lead to positive changes in brain function, cognition/attention, and academic performance on achievement tests of math and reading,” says Professor Charles Hillman, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, the lead author on the story that appeared on Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development.

The study reveals three powerful academic benefits of exercise for children:

- (1) fitness is related to the ability of children to stay focused and persevere to complete an assignment;
- (2) physically active children have increased concentration and enhanced attention spans when compared to their less active peers;
- (3) when compared to their less fit peers, those who engage in more physical activity have larger brain volumes in the areas associated with cognitive control and memory; cognitive control refers to the control of thought, action, behavior, and decision-making.

“Results point to the important potential of approaches focusing on physical activity for strengthening children's brain health and educational attainment,” notes Hillman. “It is important for state governments and school administrators to consider this evidence and promote physical activity in the school setting, which is where children spend much of their time.”

The findings on attention also encompass children with special needs. The authors say that physical activity as a non-pharmaceutical intervention for children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and children with autism spectrum disorders generates positive results.

Hillman's conclusions are backed up by another recent study.

"Our five-year study further validates other research in this important area demonstrating that providing daily physical education not only improves health, but also improves the

cognitive ability of our children," says Julian Reed, an associate professor of health sciences at Furman University, who conducted a five-year study at Legacy Charter School (Greenville, SC) which examined the effects of 45 minutes of daily exercise/physical education on academic performance and cognitive ability of its students.

It's worth noting that Legacy is the only school in South Carolina to provide 45 minutes of daily P.E. to all students.

So, what is the status quo in the U.S. as it pertains to physical activity? Current U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guidelines call for children to get 60 minutes of physical activity a day, but the Centers for Disease Control report that only 30 percent of children in the U.S. are offered daily P.E. in school.

“Frankly, leaders in academia are doing our school children a major disservice by not making P.E. a mandatory part of the school day,” says Mike May of PHIT America, the non-profit organization focused on overcoming the ‘Inactivity Pandemic’ in the U.S. “The health and academic benefits from activity are overwhelming. Our goal is to get this message delivered to school principals, head masters, and superintendents.”

Today, 28% of all Americans are totally inactive, based on research released by Sports Marketing Surveys USA. This includes not being active one time in the past year in 104 activities tracked by the Physical Activity Council. The trend for children is most disturbing: ten million children are totally ‘inactive’ and two-thirds of all children are ‘not active to healthy standards.’ Both numbers are increasing.

“We need everyone to be messengers for the importance of physical activity in our lives,” says May. “On PHITAmerica.org, there is other information on the ‘Inactivity Pandemic,’ benefits to being more active, fit and playing sports as well as PHIT America's plans and programs to fight inactivity.”

Founded in January 2013, PHIT America (<http://www.PHITAmerica.org>) is a non-profit educational, social media, and advocacy campaign focused on overcoming the ‘Inactivity Pandemic’ in America by creating a Movement for a Fit & Healthy America. More than 130 companies, along with sports ambassadors and celebrities, are helping PHIT America to get Americans more active, fit and healthier. Some of the major PHIT America initiatives include passing key legislation such as the Personal Health Investment Today Act (PHIT) which will allow Americans to use pre-tax medical accounts to pay for physical activity expenses. And, the Physical Education Program (PEP) is a program supporting increased activity in local physical education programs throughout America. PHIT America has also launched the Mayors Fitness Challenge, a new, fun 10-week, fitness program helping cities overcome the obesity and inactivity crisis. PHIT America, 8505 Fenton Street, Suite 211, Silver Spring, MD 20910 <http://www.phitamerica.org>