



Professional Articles

By Melinda Bossemmeyer, Ed.D.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND THE BRAIN

Makes the brain
function at its best



Highest thought
processes

Improved test scores

More activity in
a fit kids brain



Lowers stress levels

Reduces violence



Improves alertness,
attention and
motivation



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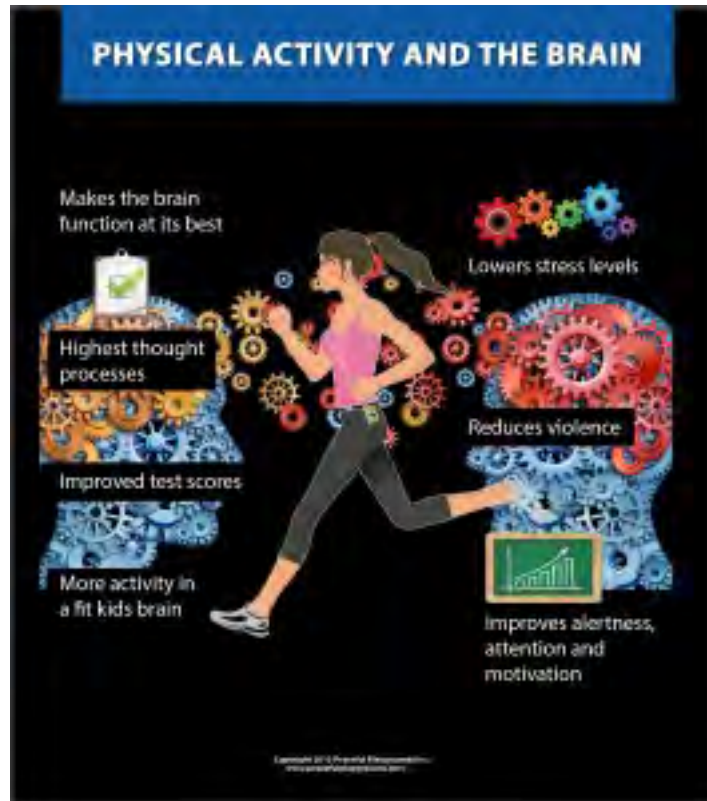
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Physical Activity and the Brain

Why Active Kids Make Better Learners

“Physical activity has dramatic effects on individuals’ physical, & mental health,” according to Charles Basch in his report, [Healthier Students Make Better Learners](#).

Put simply, educational outcomes are directly influenced by health. It is no surprise that students’ fitness levels continue to be low and obesity and overweight categories in youth continue to climb, presenting cascading and troubling trends toward overall student health and fitness.



Physical Activity Recommendations

The majority of school-age students do not meet the CDC guidelines for 60 minutes of physical activity daily, which should concern us all. While we pour money into new, innovative, educational strategies perhaps it would be wiser to shore up what we know works: reinstating physical education and physical activity opportunities in schools.

[Physical Activity and the Brain Infographic.](#)
[FREE DOWNLOAD](#)

Not only should the physical health risks be a concern, but the findings of neurosciences and child development literature continue to make a compelling case for the link between a healthy body and a healthy mind. This literature documents the importance of physical education and physical fitness and their effect on academic outcomes.

Fitness seems to buffer the deterioration of cardiovascular health, bone health, diabetes, and neurological body systems. Physical fitness and aerobic fitness are also associated with mental fitness and emotional health as well.

Download: [Healthier Students Are Better Learners](#)
Charles Basch



Health Benefits of Fitness and Physical Activity

Physical activity affects metabolism and all major body systems. The saying, “A strong mind and a strong body” is now well supported in research. Physical activity effects brain chemistry and cognitive functioning contributing to emotional stability, physical health, and the ability to learn. It is now clear and well supported that physical activity favorably affects cognitive functioning.

These findings support the case for favorable effects of physical activity or physical fitness on cognitive functioning of youth.

Three recent literature reviews conclude that school-based physical activity programs may result in short-term cognitive benefits (Taras, 2005), improvement in cognitive functioning among children (Sibley & Etnier, 2003), and further time spent in physical activity does not hinder academic achievement (Trudeau & Shepard, 2008). When the No Child Left Behind legislation was implemented across the nation, physical education, recess, and related physical activity programs were cut in an effort to raise academic scores in the federally mandated standardized tests. A report from the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention in 2005 found that there is currently no evidence to support the hypothesis that less time engaged in physical activities will be effective in increasing standardized test scores. Their research found that school-based physical activity programs were either neutral or had a positive effect on academic outcomes.

Relationship between Academics and Physical Activity

The [CDC report - Physical Activity and Performance](#) suggests that increased student physical activity and physical fitness can best be achieved through a comprehensive approach (CDC 1997) that includes physical education, recess and after school time, co-curricular physical activity opportunities, and bicycling or walking to and from school. The report indicated that the nature and scope of school-based physical activity and physical education programs varied based

on resources available (e.g., human, physical, and social environmental) and with the level of commitment by school administrators.

School Physical Activity Opportunities

Both physical education and recess have been found to increase physical activity in children. Quality physical education programs are encouraged to organize to insure that 50% of the physical education experience is physically active time for children.

Recess may be another appropriate time to promote physical activity. Research indicates that playtime/recess can contribute significantly to children's overall levels of moderate to vigorous physical activity.

Other school-based physical activity opportunities include walking or biking to school. These programs are federally funded as a means to get children more active.

Yet another type of physical activity opportunities in schools are called "brain breaks." They are short 5-10 minute breaks within the classroom where students have an opportunity to stretch and move, thus integrating physical activities and academic concepts.

The Learning Connection Report was put out by the [Action for Healthy Kids Foundation](#). It points out the academic benefits that insure children are healthy and ready to learn.

Download: [The Learning Connection](#)
Action for Healthy Kids

Physical Activity and Mental Health

It's well known that routine physical activity benefits both body and mind. And age has no limit when it comes to physical activity. Both children and adults can reap big benefits. A study published in *Clinical Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, explores whether certain factors may help to explain the value of daily physical activity for adolescent mental health. Researchers from the Trimbos Institute in the Netherlands looked at two possible explanations for the link between exercise and good mental health. One was positive self image and the other was winning friends. They surveyed 7,000 Dutch students, ages 11 to 16.

President Kennedy and Youth Fitness

This is not the first national initiative to get students more physically active. In 1956 President Eisenhower established the President's Council on Youth Fitness with Executive Order 10673. The President's Council on Youth Fitness is still active today. It was President Kennedy however, who started the first official Physical Fitness Program when he became worried that many Americans, especially the young, were growing overweight and out of shape.

Let's Move Initiative

In 2013, the First Lady's Let's Move Active Schools Initiative is aiming at similar targets.

First Lady Michelle Obama launched Let's Move! on February 9, 2010 to unite the country around our kids' health and create real support for families to live healthier lives. Since then we've seen substantial commitments from parents, business leaders, educators, elected officials, military leaders, chefs, physicians, athletes, childcare providers, community and faith leaders, and kids themselves to improve the health of our nation's children.

Given the state of youth fitness in this country, it makes sense to cease the practice of eliminating the two significant opportunities that students have to be active at school: physical education and recess. Now that we know that it enhances academic growth rather than competes with learning time, it makes sense to reinstate physical education and recess back into elementary schools across the nation with deliberate speed.

Yale University child psychologist Alan Kazdin, the editor of *Clinical Psychological Science*, says the findings show just how bountiful the benefits of exercise can be.

"I think it would be too strong to call it an elixir, but it has the broad effects of something like that," he says.

Dr. Melinda Bossenmeyer is Founder and President of Peaceful Playgrounds, Inc. She is a retired teacher, principal and county office education administrator with 27 years in public and private schools.



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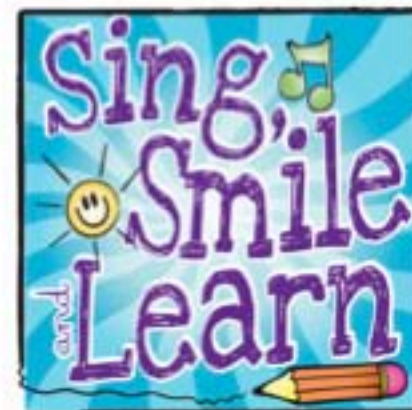
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