

Active Classrooms



Objective

Increase the amount of time children are physically active in the classroom.



Key Messages

Students need more physical activity opportunities during the school day.

- Childhood obesity has increased over the years and opportunities for students to be active have decreased.
- The National Association for Sport and Physical Education guidelines recommend children should have an accumulation of more than 60 minutes and up to several hours of physical activity each day to promote health and well-being.¹

- Fewer children walk or ride bicycles to school. The frequency and duration of time spent in physical education has been cut, and recess has been reduced or eliminated in many elementary schools, dramatically reducing daily physical activity.²

Physical activity can be easily incorporated in the classroom setting.

- Adding physical activity to the school day in 5-10 minute increments is an effective way to increase daily in-school physical activity and improve on-task behavior during academic instruction.²
- There are many resources developed based on scientific research that provide ready-to-go ideas for physical activity breaks in the classroom (see “Key Resources” below).
- A major thrust in curriculum development in schools today is the integration of subject content across the curriculum. Including physical activity in all subject areas enhances learning.
- Promoting and providing physical activity in the classroom can lead students to adopt an active lifestyle outside of school.

Adding physical activity to the classroom improves behaviors that have been shown to improve academic performance.

- Physical activity improves brain function by helping nerve cells multiply, creating more connections for learning and additional pathways to process information.³
- In-class physical activity has been associated with significantly enhanced word recognition, greater concentration, higher math fluency and improved student behavior.⁴
- While not statistically significant, improvements in spatial aptitude, math and reading skills have also been reported.⁴





Key Strategies

- **Provide students the opportunity to participate in daily classroom physical activity breaks.** Five to ten minutes of physical activity breaks should follow a maximum seat time of 90 minutes for middle and high school students and 60 minutes for elementary school students.⁵
- **Train teachers and staff on classroom-based physical activity.** Educate teachers and staff on the connection between physical activity and learning, provide information on free and low-cost active classroom resources, and practice activities such as JAMmin' Minutes® to demonstrate how to implement them with their students.
- **Explore the key resources listed below and select age appropriate physical activities that complement the subject matter you are covering.** Most physical activity breaks take less than 10 minutes. Gradually phase in new resources and activities over time to keep it fun and exciting for teachers and students. For example, in year one you may begin to implement JAMmin' Minutes® in all classrooms, followed by Great Adventures activities in year two.
- **Develop an annual plan for integrating physical activity into most subject areas.** Work closely with your school's principal on this. Provide your principal with pre-developed classroom physical activity examples such as the ones found in the "key resources" section below.
- **Adopt curriculum goals to integrate physical activity into the classroom.** Work closely with your curriculum director on this to ensure classroom-based physical activity is the norm district-wide.



Sample Policy Language

"Each day, classroom teachers provide a minimum of one physical activity break by leading his/her students in JAMmin' Minutes® or ABC for Fitness or similar physical activity break. Teachers also have the option to create physical activity breaks that relate to their core content lesson plans."

"Physical activity breaks will be documented in all teachers' lesson plans and will note the amount of time for the break and the type of physical activity that takes place."



Success Stories

Farmington Area Public Schools, ISD 192, Farmington, MN Literacy and Math PE

Literacy PE is a daily 15-minute class for struggling readers that embeds literacy components in vigorous physical activity games and activities. The class is voluntary and open to students who test below the national average on a standardized test (NWEA). The class has been conducted for six years in a variety of settings in district elementary schools, with students improving their reading test scores between 4 and 5 times the national average and between 2 and 3 times that of their peers. Math scores improved after Math PE.

For more information on implementing Literacy PE contact Jack Olwell, PE teacher in Farmington at JOlwell@farmington.k12.mn.us

Meadowview Elementary School, ISD 192, Farmington, MN JAMmin' Minutes®

One method to implement the policy of active class time is to incorporate activities such as the JAMmin' Minute®, a series of free one-minute fitness routines that includes five simple exercises that students and staff can do while standing at their desks or sitting in chairs. The program also includes health tips that teachers can communicate to students. Meadowview Elementary School uses JAMmin' Minute to also build community and awareness of the importance of physical activity. Meadowview downloads the weekly video on Thursdays and trains a class of 5th graders. The following week the fifth graders go into classrooms to lead students in the five exercises at the start of the day. Classroom teachers also have the option to use JAMmin' Minute routines throughout the day for "brain breaks."





Resources for Implementation

- **Active Classrooms: A Strategy of the Active Schools Minnesota Initiative -**
<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/Nutr/PhyActiv/053512>

Elementary Activities:

- **JAMmin' Minute®** is a series of free one-minute exercises to be used as physical activity breaks in the classroom setting: <http://www.healthetips.com/jam-program.php>
- **Active Academics** provides practical ideas for integrating physical activity in K-5 math, reading/language arts, health/nutrition, and physical education classes: <http://activeacademics.org/>
- **Take 10!** offers a searchable database of classroom-based physical activity lessons for K-5: <http://www.take10.net/>
- **Activity Bursts in the Classroom (ABC for fitness)** shows elementary schools how to restructure physical activity into multiple, brief episodes throughout the day without taking away valuable time for classroom instruction: www.davidkatzmd.com/abcforfitness.aspx
- **Brain Breaks** provides physical activity lessons for K-6 classrooms. Lesson menu is broken into specific content areas and other settings: http://emc.cmich.edu/EMC_Orchard/brain-breaks
- **Energizers** are classroom based physical activities for grades K-8 that integrate physical activity with academic concepts: www.ncpe4me.com/energizers.html
- **PE Central – Classroom Central/Integrated Lesson Plans** are designed for teachers to integrate physical activity into academic content for use in the classroom or an outdoor play area. Although mostly targeted at grades K-5 it does include some middle school lessons :<http://www.pecentral.org/lessonideas/classroom/classroom.asp>
- **Adventure to Fitness®** episodes contains 30-minute of moderate to vigorous physical activity that may be integrated into co-curricular subjects. While meant to be used in the classroom setting, this free activity resource also meets or surpasses PE mandates in all states: <http://www.adventuretofitness.com/teachers>

Secondary Activities:

- **Take a Break: Teacher Toolbox for Physical Activity Breaks in the Secondary Classroom:**
<http://www.coloradoedinitiative.org/resources/teacher-toolbox-activity-breaks/>
- **Energizing Brain Breaks Blog:** <http://energizingbrainbreaks.com/>

Sources:

1. National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (2013). *National Guidelines*. Retrieved online from <http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/standards/nationalGuidelines/>
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3. Cotman, C. and Engesser-Cesar, C. (2002). *Exercise enhances and protects brain function*. *Exerc Sport Sci Rev* 30(2): 75-9.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *The association between school based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance*. Retrieved online from http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/pa-pe_paper.pdf
5. American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. (2013). *Elementary, middle and high school inventories. Let's Move in School – PTO/PTA Toolkit*. Retrieved online from <http://www.aahperd.org/letsmoveinschool/tools/pta-pto-toolkit.cfm>

Smart Choices is a partnership of the Dakota County Public Health Department and school districts in Dakota County committed to making the healthy choice the easy choice by creating opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity before, during and after school.

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