

Active Living Research

Using Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity
and Create Active Communities

FACT SHEET

July 2012

Physically Active and Fit Children Perform Better in School

Schools can provide outstanding learning environments while improving children's health through quality physical education (PE) and physical activity breaks. This fact sheet highlights research showing that setting aside time for daily PE does not hurt academic performance and that children who are physically active and fit tend to perform better in the classroom.

Increasing time for physical education and physical activity does not hurt academic performance, and in some cases, may actually improve it

- More time in PE does not hurt academic performance, according to one national study. In fact, girls who were enrolled in PE for 70 or more minutes per week scored significantly higher on math and reading tests than did girls who were enrolled in PE for 35 or fewer minutes per week. No difference was found among boys.
- Eight representative surveys from the United States, United Kingdom, Hong Kong and Australia found that children and adolescents who participated in physical activity had better academic performance. However, none of these studies assessed academic performance with standardized educational tests.

Kids who are physically fit are likely to have stronger academic performance

- FITNESSGRAM® test results from more than 2.4 million Texas students showed that physically fit students tended to perform better on academic achievement tests.
- The FITNESSGRAM® study also found that students who were more physically fit had better school attendance rates and fewer disciplinary incidents involving drugs, alcohol, violence or truancy.

FAST FACTS

- The Surgeon General recommends children should engage in 60 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week.
- Only 3.8 percent of elementary schools provide daily physical education (PE).
- Regular exercise may improve students' concentration and cognitive functioning.

This fact sheet highlights findings from the research brief, *Active Education: Physical Education, Physical Activity and Academic Performance*.



Full research brief is available at:
<http://www.activelivingresearch.org/activeeducation>

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Activity breaks can improve cognitive performance and classroom behavior

- In a study of 11,000 elementary school students, teachers reported better classroom behavior for students who had more than 15 minutes of daily recess.
- Fourth-grade students in New Jersey exhibited significantly better concentration scores after completing a 15-minute physical activity break. However, among second- and third-grade students, the physical activity intervention had no effect on test performance.

Summary

Several studies show that more time in physical education and other school-based physical activity does not adversely affect academic performance, and in some cases, improves academic performance. Generally, children who are more physically fit tend to perform better academically, and have better school attendance and fewer disciplinary problems.