

How important are exercise and physical education in schools?

They are as important as the academic program, and I would suggest that for children who spend more than six hours a day in front of a screen, it may be more important! Study after study suggests that children should participate in sixty minutes of moderate physical activity each day. The benefits are numerous, including reducing the chances of obesity, enhancing emotional development and improving academic performance. A quick search will produce studies by universities from all over the country, as well as from such research institutes as the Center for Disease Control.

Such an abundance of research that supports the importance of physical activity for children seems to go ignored as school systems use the elimination of physical education classes as a cost-saving measure and the elimination of recess as a way of increasing academic time.

In my opinion, any high-quality educational program, dedicated to helping children reach their full potential will provide them with daily physical education classes, as well as a recess or free play time. This need does not change as they get older. Even high school students need sixty minutes of physical activity every day. The emphasis does not have to be on an organized sport. In fact, for preschool and elementary-age students, the focus should be on physical fitness and the enjoyment of physical activity. A well-articulated curriculum will provide students with exposure to a wide variety of indoor and outdoor activities and games.

The CDC states:

Regular physical activity—

- Helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles.
- Helps reduce the risk of developing obesity and chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and colon cancer.
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety and promotes psychological well-being.
- May help improve students' academic performance, including
 - Academic achievement and grades
 - Academic behavior, such as time on task
 - Factors that influence academic achievement, such as concentration and attentiveness in the classroom.

From: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/facts.htm>

If these are the facts, why would a school ignore them? For children to be ready to learn, their bodies AND their brains needs to be ready to receive and process new information. The brain receives its food, glucose and oxygen, through the circulatory system. Physical activity is what gets the blood moving efficiently through the body and to the brain.

Schools should not be choosing between time for academics and time for physical activity. Rather, schools should be making conscious decisions about how to incorporate physical activity throughout a student's day. How important are exercise and physical education in schools? They are CRITICAL.