

In this issue:

Movement in the classroom

Harvard Medical School Professor John Ratey says physical exercise “puts the brain of [students] in the optimal position for them to learn.” That’s why it’s so concerning that, according to [Healthy Active Kids Canada](#), only 7 percent of Canadian youth are getting at least one hour of physical activity per day, the minimum recommended by the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines. In K-12 alone, students spend somewhere around 995 hours each year in the classroom, yet 44 percent of school administrators have reported cutting a significant amount of time from physical education classes and recess due to increased educational demands—we may have an imbalance on our hands. This e-newsletter will discuss the benefits movement has on learning and overall health, and will offer ways for educators to incorporate increased movement in the classroom. Keep reading to find out more.

The benefits of movement on learning

Physical movement in the classroom, whether connected to your curriculum or not, has many benefits when it comes to learning:

- **Learning becomes more meaningful:** When you incorporate movement into learning, you are more likely to activate physical, emotional and cognitive responses—which, in turn, makes learning more meaningful. Take experiential learning, for example, where students are allowed to experience lessons through movement and action. This type of learning can help with comprehension and retention, for instance, through creating shapes out of one’s whole body or by reenacting a moment in history. Furthermore, research has shown that learning while engaged in movement can help sustain a learner’s attention more so than when engaged via passive listening alone.

- **Health and well-being increases:** Physical activity has been linked to improving student fitness levels, lowering the risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes, and building strong bones and muscles. Children who are more active have greater attention spans and better academic performance than those who aren't, which brings us to our next benefit.
- **Academic performance improves:** Exercise and movement not only benefit the body's health and well-being, they can boost brain health, as well. Because the brain depends on the body to supply its fuel (oxygen and glucose) the more physically fit the body, the better the brain functions. In fact, exercise can enhance cognition, stimulate new brain cell growth and improve memory.

How to increase movement at school:

Ready to get started and get students moving? Here are some ideas to amp up movement at school.

- **Forgo the chairs:** Have an antsy student on your hands? Allow lessons where students stand to learn; or have a few stability balls available for students to sit on in lieu of chairs. As adults, we have the freedom to stand and stretch when we feel it is necessary. This can help boost energy, alleviate muscle fatigue and curb restlessness. On the same note, a stability ball engages the core muscles and allows for some wiggling, which can burn off excess energy therefore, increasing attention span.
- **Use charades or games to enhance learning:** Charades and other role-play games can be a great way to get students up, moving and learning all at the same time. Prepare a list of scenarios that relate to a lesson, divide the class into teams and have students act out each concept. Keep it fun with school logo'd rewards, [tattoos](#), [stylus phone stands](#) or [multi-colour highlighters](#). Or, if you have a test review coming up, try a ball-toss game where students stand and pass a [ball](#) around the classroom to determine who's next to answer a review question.

- **Take to the outdoors:** Can some of your lessons be taught outside, perhaps during a nature walk or scavenger hunt? Or, is there someone on your staff who is particularly passionate about increasing physical activity at school? Maybe they'd be willing to orchestrate a before-or after-school program that focuses on physical activity beyond the typical intramural sports—perhaps a bike group, an aerobics class or a dance activity. Be sure to get the word out and generate interest by hanging [banners](#) in the lunchroom, gymnasium and study halls. And send handouts, email newsletters and maybe even a direct mail piece that includes a [fold-up flyer](#) to make your message soar.

Remember, the benefits of movement on learning are great. Movement can make learning more meaningful, increase attention span and improve academic performance. Try one or all of these activities to get students moving in your classroom—you may just see a difference.

Griss, Susan. "[The Power of Movement in Teaching and Learning.](#)" *Education Week Teacher*. N.p., 20 Mar. 2013. Web. Retrieved 21 Nov. 2014.

DeSilver, Drew. "[School Days: How the U.S. compares with other countries.](#)" *Pew Research Center RSS*. N.p., 2 Sept. 2014. Web. Retrieved 20 Nov. 2014.

Hellmich, Nanci. "[Report: More PE, activity programs needed in schools.](#)" *USA Today*. Gannett, 23 May 2013. Web. Retrieved 18 Nov. 2014.

"[What the Research Says.](#)" *Movement and Learning*. N.p., n.d. Web. Retrieved 24 Nov. 2014.

Blaydes, Jean, and Debby Mitchell. "[Learning Through Movement and Music: How Exercise Benefits the Brain.](#)" *Human-kinetics*. N.p., n.d. Web. Retrieved 20 Nov. 2014.

Lynch, Karen. "[How Sitting on a Ball Helps Kids Focus and Do Better In School](#)" *Gaiam Life*. N.p., n.d. Web. Retrieved 21 Nov. 2014.

Jensen, Eric. "[Teaching with the Brain and Mind: Chapter 4. Movement and Learning.](#)" *ASCD*. N.p., n.d. Web. Retrieved 19 Nov. 2014.