



How can schools integrate physical activity breaks in the classroom?

In many classrooms, students experience off-task behaviors and difficulty focusing on learning. [Physical activity breaks help students focus](#), making integration of movement into the school day, and even the classroom, beneficial to student learning. Professional development and support can help teachers feel more comfortable incorporating physical activity into their classrooms. Unfortunately, across all school levels, few teachers receive this targeted professional development that can benefit students and the academic environment.

The information in this document was developed to provide flexible, evidence-based guidance for districts to consider as they implement physical activity breaks in the classroom.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

The idea that healthy children learn better is well accepted and supported by [research](#). When physical activity is used as a break from academic learning time, students are more attentive and show increased on-task behaviors, higher levels of engagement and improved academic performance.

Many schools operate in alignment with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child \(WSCC\) model](#), understanding that the connections between health – including physical activity – and academic achievement support the whole child. Schools should consider incorporating physical activity during the school day since it aligns with the [Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program framework](#). Teachers can also integrate physical activity into planned academic instruction to reinforce academic concepts, provide physical activity

outside of planned academic instruction (sometimes known as “physical activity breaks”) or reinforce skills learned in physical education. Classroom physical activity should never replace a physical education class or recess to ensure students have every opportunity to achieve the [recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day](#).

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Every classroom should mitigate or remove space or equipment barriers that might prevent some students from accessing physical activity in the classroom, integrating modifications as needed to ensure full participation for all, including students using mobility devices.

Educators should be mindful that it is [never appropriate to use physical activity as punishment or withhold classroom physical activity from students as a disciplinary approach](#).

KEY INSIGHTS

- Provide professional development on implementing physical activity breaks in the classroom.
- Consider starting small. Implement physical activity breaks with a pilot group.
- Recruit the pilot group to help support other teachers with whole-school implementation.
- Integrate physical activity into planned academic instruction and as a break from academic instruction.
- Ensure classroom physical activity does not replace physical education class or recess.
- Refrain from using physical activity as punishment or withholding classroom physical activity from students as a disciplinary approach.

SEE ALSO

- [Why should schools consider integrating painted play spaces to increase physical activity during recess?](#)
- [How can schools and families encourage physical activity over the summer?](#)
- [How can schools implement systems that foster social and emotional learning for students?](#)

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

The CDC's [Strategies for Classroom Physical Activity in Schools](#) suggests schools implement the following three broad steps when integrating classroom physical activity:

Get organized.

- Build a team of students, physical education teachers and the school's wellness committee.
- Brainstorm short, easy activities that can be done in class without equipment, or consider free resources, including:
 - PE Kansas' Brain Breaks (grades [PreK-2](#), [3-5](#), [6-8](#), [9-12](#))
 - [Online Physical Education Network \(OPEN\): Active Classrooms](#)
 - [American Heart Association/NFL: In-School Activity Breaks](#)
- Share ideas from the team's brainstorming session.
- Provide training on physical activity breaks with a few enlisted teachers to test the plan.

Pilot test the program.

- Ask teachers testing the plan to share feedback on progress and address concerns.
- Ensure the physical education teacher or other team leader models how to implement a physical activity in enlisted teachers' classrooms.
- Once the program is up and running, ask enlisted teachers to share the benefits of implementing physical activity breaks with other teachers in the building.

Build the program out to the whole school.

- Provide training on physical activity breaks to all teachers.
- Ask enlisted teachers to support teachers new to implementing physical activity breaks.
- Make sure all students are included in physical activity breaks.
- Ensure different students have the opportunity to lead daily physical activity breaks and come up with ideas for routines.
- Establish times during the week for whole-school physical activity breaks (e.g., [Project ACES – All Children Exercise Simultaneously](#)).

Check out the CDC and Springboard to Active Schools' resources that administrators, teachers and other stakeholders can use to support implementation of physical activity breaks:

- [Integrate Classroom Physical Activity in Schools: A Guide for Putting Strategies into Practice](#)
- [Springboard to Active Schools: Classroom Physical Activity Overview](#)
- [Data Brief: Integrate Classroom Physical Activity in Schools](#)
- [Integrate Classroom Physical Activity in Schools: Getting Students Active During School \(PowerPoint\)](#)