D
o you constantly find yourself looking for innovative and easy ways to improve classroom behavior, increase student concentration, and improve performance on standardized tests? School administrators face pressures: achieving competitive test scores to receive funding; addressing new ways to manage behavioral issues in the classroom; and implementing new methods to focus today’s generation of students, who are constantly looking for stimulation. A cost-effective and unique approach to accomplish those goals is to help your students be more physically active throughout the school day.

Physical activity is essential to children’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (2008), children and adolescents need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. Because children and adolescents spend six to seven hours a day in school, it is essential for their health that schools become hubs for high-quality physical activity. Yet because of competing pressures, only about 4% of elementary schools, 8% of middle schools, and 2% of high schools in the United States offer daily physical education.

The good news is that the latest research, as reported by the Institute of Medicine (2013), indicates that physical activity not only helps kids stay active and healthy but also enhances such important skills as concentration and problem solving, which can improve academic performance. Imagine if one lesson could help improve a student’s academic performance on standardized tests and in core academic subjects. Although seemingly too good to be true, that “lesson” does exist: daily physical activity.

There are some easily accessible methods that administrators can use in their schools. The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD) and the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition (PCFSN) recognize the innumerable benefits of physical activity for students and schools, and see a great opportunity for change. In working with groups across government, public, and private sectors, AAHPERD and PCFSN have taken the lead to unleash student potential in the classroom—and in life—by bringing physical activity back into US schools through two initiatives: Let’s Move! Active Schools and the Presidential Youth Fitness Program.

Let’s Move! Active Schools
This comprehensive program empowers school champions—physical education teachers, principals, administrators, and parents—to create active environments that enable all students to get moving and reach their full potential. Let’s Move! Active Schools gives educators a clear road map to create active school environments. Active schools incorporate physical activity into the daily lives of students by focusing on five areas: physical education, physical activity during school, staff member involvement, physical activity before and after school, and family and community engagement.

Participating schools have access to free opportunities to get students moving. Schools are directed to activation grants, professional development, and technical assistance to support their efforts to create active school environments. Champions will be guided through a simple six-step process that will direct them to tools and resources to support their efforts to become a Let’s Move! Active School.

Presidential Youth Fitness Program
To support high-quality physical education in schools, the Presidential Youth Fitness Program offers physical education teachers the basic tools they need to empower students to adopt healthy habits that will last a lifetime. The program provides a model for fitness education that includes using
A health-related fitness assessment as well as educational and motivational tools to support teachers and students in adopting an active lifestyle. The Presidential Youth Fitness Program emphasizes setting goals, working towards one’s personal best, and recognizing individual accomplishments. This is a free and voluntary program that can be enhanced by supplemental (fee-based) resources.

Professional development for teachers is available through virtual courses as well as in-person trainings, and contact hours will be available to teachers who complete it. The modules will equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to successfully and seamlessly implement the Presidential Youth Fitness Program in their schools.

The fitness assessment of the Presidential Youth Fitness Program, also known as FITNESSGRAM, is a web-based program that allows data to be easily tracked, recorded, and securely stored. Schools, districts, and states (depending on which entity receives the license) own their data, and analyses can be used for program improvement. Customized reports can be printed for student and parent education. Awards are available for students who achieve a healthy level of fitness.

Call to Action
Secondary school principals play an enormously important role in supporting the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of the students in their schools. We have highlighted two major national initiatives that enable you to fill that role in simple and direct ways. Those initiatives will benefit students and the whole school community. We recommend the following strategies:

Implement the Presidential Youth Fitness Program to encourage students to adopt lifelong healthy habits. Visit www.pyfp.org for more information.

Encourage teachers, staff members, and school leaders to become champions for Let’s Move! Active Schools at www.letsmoveschools.org.

Reinforce to parents, teachers, and staff members that active kids do better—in the classroom and in life.

Young people, by nature, want to move! Creating positive experiences for students and integrating physical activity into everyday life will encourage future generations to embrace physical activity as the norm—running, jumping, and kicking will help students reach their greatest potential.

**REFERENCE**


**RESOURCES**


E. Paul Roetert is the CEO of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance in Reston, VA.
Shellie Y. Pfohl is the executive director of the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition in Rockville, MD.