Each day in the news we hear about the childhood obesity epidemic, but we only have to look at a class picture from twenty years ago to notice that many of today’s students are comparatively bigger. Part of the reason for the size increase is a severe reduction in how much students move today, compared to students two decades ago.

Nowadays, many students are driven to school instead of walking or biking. Out of school they sit inside, plugged into technology instead of playing outdoors. In the past, many schools gave students morning, lunch, and afternoon recess. Now, students are fortunate to get any time at all, as many schools have eliminated or severely cut back recess time with the pressures of state testing looming overhead.

While it may make sense on paper to provide students with more instructional minutes, the loss of physical activity and time outside can negatively affect their ability to concentrate—and impact their behavior. According to Alice Moag-Stahlberg from PTA Our Children magazine, physical activity programs are linked to stronger academic achievement, increased concentration, and improved math, reading, and writing test scores. Sadly today, less than 25 percent of children get 30 minutes of any type of physical activity every day.¹

Fortunately, there are ways that we can sneak physical activity into the school day. By adding just two or three minutes of movement each hour, we can add fifteen minutes of movement a day. That makes 75 minutes a week, or 45 hours over a 180-day school year!

Here are some ideas to get you and your students up and moving!

Get Up and Move Breaks

These quick bursts of activity designed to get students out of their seats, allow them to recharge their minds, and get back to work quickly. It may take them some practice to do the activities efficiently, but I’ve found that they love these “burst” activities and so they are motivated to do them correctly.

• 7 Silent Seconds. When you notice the students need a little break and the classroom could use a quick tidying, say, “Seven silent seconds!” and then count to seven slowly. During this time, the students will scurry around the room picking up trash and scraps, generally organizing, etc. When you get to seven, students should all be back in their seats and working again. The key to this activity is that children must be silent the entire time, and be back to work by the time you get to “seven,” so that someone walking by would think a cleaning tornado had just swept through the room. It takes a few runs to get the silent part down, but once they learn it, they love to do it. You can even assign a daily 7 Silent Second Captain, who gets to call out the countdown a few times during the day.

—First Lady Michelle Obama

Keep 'em Reading

- **Get a Breath of Fresh Air.** Open the door, have everyone quickly get outside, instruct them to take several deep breaths, and then usher them speedily back into the room and to work again.
- **Dance Break.** Play two minutes of upbeat music while students dance by their desks.
- **Personal Trainer of the Day.** Assign a different student each day to be the class personal trainer. Have the students write down the training they want the other students to do, and time it so that it lasts no longer than two minutes (this is a good homework activity). Keep the training cards in a box at the front of the room. When it is a particular student’s day to be the personal trainer, she will get out the training card she made and lead the class in two minutes of exercise.
- **Allow students to sit on an exercise ball to do their work.**
- **Nursery Rhyme Songs.** Get students up and moving while they sing nursery rhymes. For older students, teach them the songs in Spanish and have them act them out. Some good songs for this include “The Wheels on the Bus,” “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes,” “The Farmer in the Dell,” and “Old MacDonald.”
- **Waiting in Line.** While waiting for art, lunch, or any time the children have to wait in line, have them:
  - Run in place
  - Do push-ups against the wall
  - Walk their fingers up and down the wall
  - Balance on one leg
  - March in place
  - Stretch
  - Sit down and stand back up five times
  - Touch their elbow to the opposite knee
- **60-Second “Air” Games with No Equipment.** Have students play air tennis (or catch) with someone across the room for one minute, pretend to ski down a mountain for one minute, pretend to swim (freestyle, backstroke, etc.) for one minute, etc.
- **Wiggle Worm.** Call out different parts of the body to wiggle and get all the wiggles out!

Getting Active Across the Curriculum

**Math**

- **Counting**
  - Skip while counting, i.e., 3, 6, 9, 12, etc.
  - Count by 10s while doing jumping jacks
  - Hop while counting by 2s
  - For older students, do a movement activity while counting by 7s, 8s, etc., to help them learn their multiplication tables.

- **Pattern**
  Have a line of students show pattern in movement. For example, have every other student sit down while the other students in line spin in a circle. (This would be an AB pattern.)

- **Computation and Place Value**
  - Use people to model addition and subtraction problems. Get the flag vests from the PE teacher and sort students by color. For instance, if you are an orange vest, you represent the 10s; if you are a green vest, you represent the 100s; if you are not wearing a vest, you are in the ones group. For younger students, use this to model counting up. For older students, use this to model borrowing, carrying, and regrouping.
  - For another computation activity, write a math problem on one half of an index card and the answer on the other. Make enough cards for each student to have one problem card and one answer card (that is not the answer to their problem). Students must solve their problem and walk around to find the matching answer card.
Word Problems
Write out word problems that involve movement, and have groups of students take turns acting them out for their peers to solve. For instance, a two-part problem for six students might be:
1. “Three grasshoppers were jumping in a field. Two worms wiggled over to join the fun. All the jumping and wiggling got the attention of a swallow, who flapped over to investigate. How many critters were now in the field?”
2. “If the swallow scared the worms away, how many critters were left in the field?”

Measurement
• How many steps are there from the library to the gym? How many footsteps does it take you to walk 100 feet? How about 1,000 feet? What is the perimeter of our room in your footsteps? What about the diameter? Invite students to find out!
• For an approximation activity, have students stand up and give them directions such as, “Move one inch left, two yards forward, and one foot back.” This will also help students recognize the names of particular distances.

Science
• Have students rotate and revolve around the room according to the solar system.
• How does a tree grow? Have students start out as a seed, poke through the ground, form a stem, and then branches. Then, bend and sway in the wind.
• When studying the human body, invite students to act as blood cells that race through the veins to the heart and lungs.

Social Studies
Create tableaus of an event in history, or act out a vivid scene in history.

Geography
• Have students stand up and face different directions as you call them out.
• Go to an open space and have students create the shape of a continent with their bodies. Stand on a ladder and photograph them so they can see how closely they matched the area they were trying to form.

Language Arts
Invite students to:
• Form the letters of the alphabet with their bodies
• Mime a scene from a book
• Act out a fairy tale as you tell it aloud
• Form the letters of each vocabulary word as you spell it aloud. Call on students to give you the correct definition of the word. The first student to correctly define the word can say the next word aloud.
• Stand up and write large letters or numbers in the air with your arms. Older students can write their spelling words in the air. When they all do it together, it almost looks like a dance.
• Get into alphabetical order. Give each student an index card with a different word on it. Have them arrange themselves in ABC order without talking. The cards can later be used in a center where students lay the cards on the floor in ABC order.
• Play a vocabulary search game. Take a pack of index cards and draw an interlocking shape along the center of each card. Make vocabulary cards for the concepts you are studying by writing the word on one side and the definition on the other. Cut each card apart into two puzzle pieces. Give each student one half of a card, and have them move about the room as they search for their partner. When they have found their partners, have them share the word and definition with the class.

Reading to Get Students Moving

Nonfiction
• **Exercise (Healthy Lifestyles)** by Katie Dicker. Amicus, 2011.
• **Exercise by the Numbers** (Real World Math: Health and Wellness) by Cecilia Minden. Cherry Lake Pub., 2007.
• **Get Active!** (Crabtree Connections) by Louise Spilsbury. Crabtree Publishing, 2010.
• **Healthy Bodies** (Healthy and Happy) by Robyn Hardyman. PowerKids Press, 2011.
• **Sid the Science Kid: Everybody, Move Your Feet!** (Let’s-Read-and-Find... Science 1) by Jodi Huelin. HarperFestival, 2010.
• **Summer Fit Fourth to Fifth Grade: Prepare Fourth Graders Mentally, Physically and Socially for Fifth Grade** by Kelly Terrill and Portia Marin. Summer Fit Learning, 2011. [Also available for grades K-1, 1-2, 2-3, and 3-4]
• **Surfing** (Healthy for Life) by Jim Fitzpatrick. Cherry Lake Pub., 2007.
• **Tae Kwon Do!** (Step into Reading) by Terry Pierce and Todd Bonita. Random House, 2006.
• **Teaching Yoga to Children Through Story** (Storytime Yoga) by Sydney Solis. The Mythic Yoga Studio, 2006.
• **Yoga Games for Children: Fun and Fitness with Postures, Movements and Breath** (SmartFun Activity Books) by Danielle Bersma, Marjoke Visscher and Alex Kooistra. Hunter House, 2003.
• **Yoga Pretzels** (Yoga Cards) by Tara Guber, Leah Kalish and Sophie Fatus. Barefoot Books, 2005.

**FICTION**

• **Angels Don’t Know Karate** (The Adventures Of The Bailey School Kids #23) by Debbie Dadey and Marcia T. Jones. Scholastic, 1996.
• **Breathing Not Required** (Sports Stories) by Michele Martin Bossley. Lorimer, 1995.
• **Football Double Threat** (Matt Christopher Sports Classics) by Matt Christopher and Stephanie Peters. Little, Brown and Company, 2008.

• **Home Field Advantage #3** (Backyard Sports) by Michael Teitelbaum and Ron Zalme. Grosset & Dunlap, 2008.


• **Julie Black Belt: The Kung Fu Chronicles** by Oliver Chin and Charlene Chua. Immedium, 2008.

• **Karate Kick** (Matt Christopher Sports Fiction) by Matt Christopher and Stephanie Peters. Little, Brown and Company, 2009.

• **Mermaids Don’t Run Track** (Bailey School Kids, No. 26) by Debbie Dadey and Marcia T. Jones. Scholastic, 1997.


• **Snowboard Maverick: Can a skateboard pro conquer the slopes?** (Matt Christopher Sports Classics) by Matt Christopher. Little, Brown and Company, 1997.


• **The Karate Class Mystery** (Invisible Inc., No. 5; Hello, Reader! Level 4) by Elizabeth Levy. Cartwheel, 1996.

• **The Karate Mouse** (Geronimo Stilton, No. 40) by Geronimo Stilton. Scholastic, 2010.


• **The Race Across America** (Geronimo Stilton, No. 37) by Geronimo Stilton. Scholastic, 2009.


**ONLINE RESOURCES**

• **Centers for Disease Control**: [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/npao/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/npao/index.htm)
  This site has good tips for healthy eating and links for educators that include ideas for schools to implement and promote fitness.

• **Family Fitness Night Resources**: [http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/profdev/profdev095.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/profdev/profdev095.shtml)
  Great ideas for holding a Family Fitness night at your school.

• **PE Central** [http://www.pecentral.org](http://www.pecentral.org)
  Great site with lesson plans and activities. Click on the Lessons tab; from there you can select the subject area where you will find a wealth of lessons that incorporate fitness into your subject matter.

• **Physical Education Lesson Plan Page** [http://pazz.tripod.com/lesson.html](http://pazz.tripod.com/lesson.html)
  Contains lesson plans for games such as “50 States” and “North, South, East, West.”

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