

BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical activity, both structured (e.g., physical education) and unstructured (e.g., recess, free play), boosts children's physical and mental health, academic achievement, and emotional wellbeing.^{1, 2}



FACTS ON GEORGIA'S YOUTH

Among youth ages 10-17:

- 15.1% are overweight³
- 17.2% are obese⁴

Approximately 63% middle and high school students do not meet the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day.⁵

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RECOMMENDATIONS, BY AGE



0-1 year:⁶

Daily play with adult (e.g., peek-a-boo, tummy time)



1-3 years:⁷

- 30 minutes of *structured play* (e.g., obstacle courses, guided games)
- 60+ minutes of *unstructured play* (e.g., recess, free play)



6-17 years:⁸

60+ minutes of daily physical activity each day (e.g., recess, sports practice, walking)

BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PLAY

Structured and unstructured physical activity impact the following areas:



Learning and Academic Performance

- Higher grades and standardized test scores⁹
- Better memory and vocabulary recall¹⁰
- Improved performance for students below grade level¹¹



Social and Emotional Development

- Increases opportunity for development of social, intrapersonal, and communication skills, especially for young children^{12, 13}
- Boosts brain function tied to focus, memory, and positive mood¹⁴
- Promotes self-regulation and coping techniques among young children^{15, 16}

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MORE BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PLAY



Mental and Behavioral Health

- Reduces depression, stress, and psychological distress¹⁷
- Improves positive self-image, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being¹⁸



Classroom Engagement and Productivity

- Helps kids stay focused and on-task¹⁹
- Decreases disruptive behaviors²⁰
- Strengthens executive function (e.g., planning, organization, flexibility)²¹



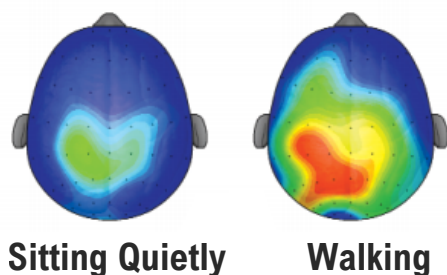
Physical Health and Fitness

- Improves motor skills and coordination²²
- Builds strong bones and muscles²³
- Reduces the risk of chronic disease (e.g., heart disease, Type 2 diabetes)²⁴



Cognitive and Brain Health

Average composite of 20 students' brains taking the same test after sitting quietly or taking a 20 minute walk



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KEY TERMS

Body Mass Index (BMI): a ratio of weight to height used to determine weight status²⁶

Obese: BMI above the 95th percentile²⁷

Overweight: BMI between 85th-95th percentile²⁸

Structured Play: adult-guided with goals (e.g., P.E., skill games)²⁹

Unstructured Play: child-led, creative, open-ended play (e.g., recess)³⁰

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Require that K-5 students receive a minimum of 30 minutes of unstructured activity (e.g., recess) and 6-8 students receive a minimum of 20 minutes of unstructured activity per day



Ensure that neither physical activity nor recess opportunities are withheld for disciplinary reasons



Ensure physical activity during recess is not used as punishment (e.g., walking laps instead of free play)



Design built environment utilizing elements that encourage physical activity for youth and adults



Increase access to afterschool and summer learning programs that support health and active lifestyles through opportunities for formal and informal physical activity and recreation

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