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Kids are toning up, tuning in



Lauren Anastos (left) and Jaclyn Diemer, both 11, throw a ball in a sit-up position during the morning gym class at Lillian M. Jacobs Elementary School in Hull.

By **Johanna Seltz**, Globe Correspondent | May 20, 2012 04:00 AM

HULL — Teachers at Jacobs Elementary School don't mind when their students get to class a little sweaty and out of breath. That's because the youngsters coming from the school's early-morning exercise class seem better able to stay in their seats for the rest of the day.

"We only have anecdotal evidence, but it does seem like students who participate are more focused for school," said school principal Jean Penta. "Teachers have noticed [the students have] a better ability to attend at the beginning of the day.

"It's a really good way to get [youngsters] started in the morning. It's much better than sitting in front of the TV waiting for the bus," she said.

Inspired by research like that of Harvard Medical School psychiatrist Dr. John Ratey, who describes

exercise as “Miracle-Gro for the brain,” the early-morning exercise movement is gaining traction in education circles.

Locally, in addition to Hull, schools in Avon, Dedham, Hingham, Middleborough, Norwood, Westwood, and Boston have jumped on the trend. Officials hope getting kids moving early and often will not only improve their physical fitness, and strike a blow against childhood obesity, but also improve their academic prowess.

Hingham’s Foster Elementary School started a before-school exercise class in March. More than 100 students signed up, and the school had to hold a lottery to fill the 40 available spaces, according to principal Debbie Stellar. She said she hopes to expand the twice-a-week program next year.

The Hingham volunteers who run the classes were trained by BOKS, an acronym for Build Our Kids’ Success. The program started in one Natick elementary school in 2009, and since becoming affiliated with Reebok in Canton has expanded to 84 schools around the country, according to founder and executive director Kathleen Tullie.

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