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## Schools

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### Exercise program helps Red Hawk Elementary students physically, mentally

Erie elementary school starts every day in motion

By Magdalena Wegrzyn Longmont Times-Call

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Fourth-grader Asher Rogers exercises at his desk on Wednesday during a morning movement program at Red Hawk Elementary School in Erie. ( LEWIS GEYER )

ERIE -- Before reviewing spelling words Wednesday morning, the fourth-graders in Michael Prough's classroom at Red Hawk Elementary School in Erie started with a quick warm-up.

The aerobic kind.

For the first 20 minutes of the school day, the students did calisthenics along with an exercise video showing on a projection screen at the front of their classroom.

"They're fun," said Sadie Horner, 9. "It makes listening not so boring in class because we have time to do something that gets our energy out, and it makes our brains want to learn more."

That's what principal Cyrus Weinberger had in mind when he implemented a movement program at the school, which opened in August.

Each morning,



students kick off the day with one of three movement exercises: aerobics in the classroom, brisk laps inside the school or a run/walk outside. On Fridays, the school's 450 students participate in a schoolwide physical activity

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Kindergartners play tag at Red Hawk Elementary School in Erie on Wednesday morning. For 20 minutes every day, students engage in the morning movement program as preparation to help them learn. ( LEWIS GEYER )

outside.

Teachers are also encouraged to devote another 20 minutes in the afternoon to physical activity, Weinberger said.

The quick exercise breaks help Prough's students focus, both in

the morning and in the afternoon, he said.

"It winds them up in the morning, and in the afternoon, especially after lunch, it gets them energized again," Prough said.

Weinberger said the daily movement lays a foundation for healthy lifestyles and complements the school's academic program, which includes both the traditional St. Vrain curriculum and Core Knowledge, a sequential curriculum for language arts, history, geography, math, science and arts.

"There's substantial research that shows vigorous activity, along with a rigorous academic program, supports brain development, retention of information, school climate and behavior," said Weinberger, referencing Harvard psychiatrist John Ratey's book, "Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain." He used the book as a launching pad for the movement program.

The book documents how regular physical activity, coupled with a strong academic program, "is really the best way to build a healthy body and mind," Weinberger said.

Short bursts of exercise throughout the day help children who have sensory processing issues and spectrum autism concentrate, said Garr Rice, a nurse and former exercise physiologist who heads the parent-teacher organization's movement committee.

"For healthy kids, it increases neurotransmitters' production, which allows them focus better," Rice said.

Back in the classroom, fourth-grader C.J. Carter said he's more attentive after a 20-minute workout.

"It kind of opens up your mind when you're done exercising," he said.

Because most Red Hawk students have gym class only once or twice a week, incorporating daily physical activities becomes crucial, said physical education teacher Tanya Arends.

Arends plans to purchase pedometers and prizes for classes that complete the most laps, using a \$2,000 LiveWell Longmont grant the program recently received.

"It's just phenomenal to walk around the school and see teachers getting kids active," she said.

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