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Is More Recess the Answer to Academic Woes?

Studies show that movement during the day increases test scores and focus.

By [Rachael Grant Dixon](#) | May 19, 2011



The popular trend in education today is that more focus needs to be on math, science and reading, which requires more time sitting behind a desk and less time engaging in movement and free play. If it seems to make sense that more class time would yield better test scores, then why isn't it?

There is no one reason American students generally do not rank within the [top 10 countries](#) in math, science and reading. Researchers and educators are often times quick to point the finger at poor teachers, lack of funding, decline in the American family, socioeconomic status, and a number of contributing factors.

While this seems to be a gloomy outcome, there is one strategy that has proven to increase brain function and creativity with minimal expense involved. That is the encouragement and opportunity for students to engage in movement and free play.

According to a study published in [Pediatrics](#) (2007), students who were given recess at least once a day for 20 minutes had more focus and attention, and teachers reported better classroom behavior.

It's also important to note that free play and movement-based activities should also be promoted and planned at home. With the rise of childhood obesity and diabetes, it's clear our children are not moving far from the TV.

There are many reasons free play or recess is important for students. It encourages imagination, creativity, develops social skills, fosters problem solving and leadership, and promotes physical well-being. In addition, Dr. John Ratey called exercise "Mental Miracle-Gro." He explains that exercise encourages brain cells to grow and neurological connections needed for learning to be enhanced. Even the [California Department of Education](#) has consistently shown that students with higher physical fitness scores also have higher academic scores.

As parents, as educators, and as a community, we need to do all we can to promote and encourage free play, movement and physical fitness at home and at school.

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