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[Spark Student Success with Physical Activity](#)

Posted by Harry Houghton on Tue, Aug 30, 2011 @ 10:41 AM

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Parents can help their children become more successful math students by encouraging them to be active during out-of-school time. Physical activity has been shown to improve academic performance due to the effect it has on the brain. According to [John Ratey](#), a clinical associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, exercise stimulates the brain, sustains attention, and promotes people's ability to sort through information and take it in. Furthermore, physical activity may reduce the symptoms of oppositional defiance disorder and ADHD, which reduce many students' focus in the classroom. Dr. Ratey describes exercise as "Miracle-Gro for the brain" because it preserves nerve cells and even makes them stronger.



In his book *Spark*, Dr. Ratey profiles the [Learning Readiness Physical Education](#) program in Naperville, IL. The difference in achievement between students who participated in the program and those who didn't is significant. The addition of exercise to students' schedules was associated with an especially large jump in science and mathematics performance. Notably, after the program was introduced, eighth grade students from the Naperville schools finished first in the world in science and sixth in math on the TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) international standards test.

City Park Collegiate School in Saskatchewan, Canada has experienced similar success by implementing strenuous physical activity as part of the math and language arts curricula. Students were more focused and attentive after 20 minutes of cardio exercise and found it much easier to apply themselves to their schoolwork. You can view a documentary, *Brain Gains*, about the school's program on [Dr. Ratey's website](#).

Parents can encourage their children to experience the positive effects of exercise by modeling an active lifestyle. One mother from Natick, Massachusetts, inspired by Dr. Rately's book, established a before-school exercise program for students at a local elementary school. The program, called [Build Our Kids' Success](#) (BOKS), has since expanded to 25 schools in the Boston area. It is important, especially in an age of technology, to get kids moving. We'd love to hear about similar physical activity initiatives in your district. Are they working?

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