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Looking to spark learning



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COLLINGWOOD – Jump rope and trampolines in class?

At Collingwood Collegiate Institute, activities such as this are becoming the norm.

The school launched an initiative called Spark at the start of this school year.

The program comes from a book of the same name, which was written by John Ratey, MD.

CCI principal Mike Abram is a big believer in the program.

"The whole premise, the science behind it, is if you're physically active, you're going to spark your brain, which makes you more ready to learn," he said.

Abram and teacher Trila Miller attended a conference on the program in August that was organized by Harvard University.

Abram said a 25-member committee was struck to promote the initiative among teachers in the school.

Teachers are encouraged to take students out of class for some physical activity.

"If things are starting to lag in class, for 15 or 20 minutes, you take them out. Throw a Frisbee, throw a football," Abram said. "If you take 15 or 20 minutes out of a class, it has no negative impact on the academics. I can work here for 15 or 20 minutes and I have to get up and walk."

Some classes walk around the track, some play hacky sack, while others, like Tracy Checkley's social sciences class, jump rope in the hallway.

"It's excellent. It gives the kids a brain break during the day and it's amazing how focused they are when they come back to class," said Checkley. "It's more of a social thing as well, kids get to know one another."

Students also don't have to leave class to get some physical activity. In Checkley's class she has trampolines, which the students can use if they need a break.

"Anytime they need a break, they can go do it. It's not interruptive at all," she said.

Abram said in one class they have a step machine and are also looking into getting some exercise balls for students to sit on as opposed to chairs.

"We have some stand-up desks for students who would like to stand-up while they're in class," he said.

Abram said according to the book, people are likely to use more of their brain if they are physically active. Abram believes that if students are more active, they will learn better, which will improve test scores, self-esteem, student attitudes and should lead to a decrease in office referrals and suspensions.

He said they are looking at promoting healthy lifestyles at the school, not only with the Spark program but also the HEAT (Healthy Eating Active Team) - student-driven initiative that promotes healthy food and snacks to students.

Abram is hoping they will do a school-wide event in the coming months.

"If this is going to work, it has to be us with the kids," he said. "Everybody can do this. It's not your top athletes, you don't have to be in the best shape."

Abram said the school will accept donations of any used sports and fitness equipment as part of the program. For more information call [705-445-3161](tel:705-445-3161).

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