

Treadmills put N.B. students on learning track

Move 2 Improve alternative program fashioned after Sask. initiative

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[CBC News](#)

Beaverbrook School in Moncton, N.B., has rolled out a fleet of treadmills, spin bikes and elliptical machines to help students who have difficulty coping in a traditional classroom.



Students shown here at City Park Collegiate School in Saskatoon take part in a program that incorporates fitness with education. Beaverbrook School has also brought the concept of using treadmills and other fitness equipment in the classroom to Moncton, N.B. (CBC) About 25 students are enrolled in the Move 2 Improve alternative education program by School District 2.

After just a couple of months, students like J.R. Stewart are reaping the benefits.

"I'm more focused on my work I don't have to worry about putting that much of an effort into thinking — it does it by itself," he said.

The program, which incorporates exercise into students' daily routine, is based on the premise that physical activity helps students improve their concentration and learning skills.

Beaverbrook principal Norval McConnell said that after students got over the initial novelty of the program, it started paying off.

"Now that it's part of their routine, they come dressed properly, they participate more actively. We're really, really pleased, and the observation of their teachers is when they come back to class, they're more settled and more ready to go to work, which jives with what all the research says," McConnell said.

Beaverbrook School has roughly 150 kindergarten to Grade 8 students, plus another about 200 students enrolled in the middle and high school alternative education programs.

The fitness program is aimed at the students in the alternative education program.

Benefits inside and outside classroom

The Moncton program is fashioned after an initiative created by Allison Cameron at City Park Collegiate School in Saskatoon.

The initiative was developed based on research conducted by Dr. John Ratey from Harvard Medical University.

New physical activity guidelines developed by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) and released in January note that young people five to 17 years old should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily for health benefits.

School District 2 says that while the primary goal of the Move 2 Improve program is to better student health and readiness for learning, another objective is to boost literacy and numeracy skills through fitness.

The district also says the research has found these targeted interventions help keep kids focus on their classwork, which keeps them from dropping out and reduces criminal activity.

Tanya Thibeau, the physical education mentor in School District 2, said that when students exercise, it "helps improve concentration" and makes them less fidgety.

"[The program improves] your ability to sustain and retain attention and process, bring in information, process it and retain it for longer periods of time," Thibeau said.

Thibeau said if the program proves successful, it could expand to other schools in the province.

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