

Exercise and learning

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The Institute of Medicine said recently that PE should be a core subject at schools across the nation.

Coverage of the report focuses on the importance of exercise in combating obesity. And it noted a reluctance to schedule exercise time for fear that it takes away from math, reading and science.

But there's evidence for positive links between exercise and learning. John Ratey at Harvard has written extensively about the connection, and says exercise makes the brain "more ready to learn." Ron Clark, an NC native and nationally renowned teacher, built a big slide right into the lobby of the school he founded in Atlanta.

When I heard Clark speak last year he said we're just about the only country in the world that expects elementary and middle schoolers to sit still all day in class, and if they can't, we drug them. That, he said, is insane.

And, so, I'll keep trotting out a piece I wrote in 2012 for the Winston-Salem Journal until education policy makers pay attention, or someone can explain to me why this isn't just a no-duh good idea:

A Canadian teacher named Allison Cameron put exercise bikes and treadmills in her high school classroom in 2007. Three days a week Cameron split language arts classes into 20 minutes of exercise and 20 minutes of regular teaching.

Sometimes students would read as they exercised, but often they'd just chat or listen to music, she said.

The other two days of the week Cameron added pushups and situps to math classes, she said. All this exercise was in addition to regular physical education classes at the school, and the results "blew me out of the water," Cameron said.

Body mass indexes went down and test scores went up, particularly in writing, according to data posted on Cameron's website. An eighth-grade class keeping to Cameron's "Movement Matters" program improved its writing test scores 245 percent over a school year, she said.

Another eighth-grade class at the school, which didn't do the program, saw its writing test scores go down over the same period, she said.

"The only thing different in these groups of students' day was that language arts was replaced by Movement Matters (for) 20 minutes, three times a week," Cameron said in an email. "While the students of the participating group were exercising, the other group was spending the entire 40-minute Language Arts period on academics."

alongside them, Cameron said students “let their guards down, and this brand new relationship started to form.”