

# Fitness Breaks at School



Fitness breaks activate the brain, improve on-task behavior and leave students more focused and ready to learn.<sup>1</sup> There are lots of fun and creative ways to include fitness breaks in the daily schedule, and there are lots of resources available to help schools get started.

## Classroom Activity Breaks

- Brain breaks are quick exercises that can last a minute or more. Some are specifically designed to cross the body's midline, which helps to engage both sides of the brain. **Brain Gym**, **Energizing Brain Breaks** and the **Just-a-Minute (JAM)** school program are all good resources.
- Breathing, stretching and short yoga exercises have been shown to have many benefits for kids in school. They can calm and clear the mind, relieve tension and stress, increase concentration, focus and attention span.<sup>2</sup>

### Instant Recess®

UCLA health services professor Antronette Yancey created the **Instant Recess** program. Composed of 10 minute movement routines that the average American can easily perform, much of the appeal of Instant Recess lies in its incorporation of sport and cultural dance techniques. For example, one video depicts Native American tribal dancing and integrates it into the 10-minute workout.

The point of having these cultural elements is to build enthusiasm for exercising, something Dr. Yancey says is largely absent in America today – in fact her concern is that fitness has become too “medicalized.”<sup>3</sup>

### Music Is Key

Music is a powerful tool. At **East Grand School District** in Granby, Colorado, you might see students dancing to music during transitions or movement breaks, special education classes doing ball exercises with music, music setting the tone of the day or being used to introduce a lesson theme.<sup>4</sup>

- Physical activity can also be linked to specific academic content learning.<sup>5</sup> Teachers can have students practice spelling or vocabulary words while walking around the room. Or they could play a game of charades based on a topic the class is studying. **Active Academics**, **Take 10** and the **Healthy Kids Club** are good resources.



## More Ideas<sup>6</sup>

- Use fitness alarms – like fire drills, ring the bell and have the whole school drop everything for a fitness break.
- Ask teachers to take “Walk and Talk” breaks – the class goes for a walk and discusses the lesson along the way.
- Have the PE teacher or other school staff lead fitness breaks during morning announcements.
- Use music to get kids moving more in the classroom, in the hallways during transitions and during lunch. Be sure to use music and videos that appeal to the age groups you are targeting.

*For middle and high school students:*

- Implement fitness breaks during homeroom or the “advisory” period.
- Involve students in creating, planning and leading their own activity breaks.
- Start slowly, have patience and be persistent.<sup>7</sup>



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## Tips for Success<sup>8</sup>

- Teachers, school staff and parent volunteers: model enthusiasm for physical activity by participating in breaks with students.
- Demonstrate the breaks during staff meetings – a few at a time. Don't give a whole stack of activities for teachers to try all at once. They'll be overwhelmed and will be less likely to use any of them.
- Start a video exercise library for classroom use. Gather ideas from students, teachers and other parents, and your favorite resources.
- Modify activities so that all students can participate, whatever their fitness level and whatever special needs they may have.
- Write fitness breaks into wellness policies and school improvement plans to ensure they become a permanent part of the school culture.

Parent Advocate Shannon Ratliff, felt that **Brain Breaks** should be a routine part of the day at **South Lakewood Elementary** in Colorado. With a grant from Action for Healthy Kids, Shannon provided each teacher with a box of props, laminated training cards and a Smart Board application for the entire school to use. Shannon held a training class, implemented a program to track progress, and created incentives for them to reach their goals. Teachers and kids love the program!

### Classroom Activity Breaks

- Instant Recess: [www.toniyanney.com/IR\\_Products.html](http://www.toniyanney.com/IR_Products.html)
- Just-A-Minute (JAM) Program: [www.healthetips.com/jam-program.php](http://www.healthetips.com/jam-program.php)
- Energizing Brain Breaks: [energizingbrainbreaks.com/](http://energizingbrainbreaks.com/)
- Brain Gym: [www.braingym.org](http://www.braingym.org)
- Healthy Kids Club: [pvhs.org/body.cfm?id=1545](http://pvhs.org/body.cfm?id=1545)

### Yoga Programs

- Yoga Health Foundation: [yogahealthfoundation.org/](http://yogahealthfoundation.org/)
- Yoga 4 Classrooms®: [www.yoga4classrooms.com/](http://www.yoga4classrooms.com/)
- Mindful Life: [www.mindfullifeyoga.com/](http://www.mindfullifeyoga.com/)
- Yoga Kids: [www.yogakids.com/](http://www.yogakids.com/)
- K-12 Yoga: [www.k-12yoga.org/](http://www.k-12yoga.org/)

## Resources

### Content Learning with Movement

- Active Academics: [www.activeacademics.org](http://www.activeacademics.org)
- Take 10!: [www.take10.net](http://www.take10.net)
- Math and Literacy Activity Cards: [pvhs.org/body.cfm?id=1545](http://pvhs.org/body.cfm?id=1545)

### For Secondary Students

Colorado Legacy Foundation, "Take a Break! Teacher Toolbox – Physical Activity Breaks in the Secondary Classroom."  
<http://colegacy.org/resource/movemore/>

**Action for Healthy Kids®** partners with teachers, students, parents, school wellness experts and more to fight childhood obesity, undernourishment and physical inactivity by helping schools become healthier places so kids can live healthier lives. Our programs, tools and resources make it possible for everyone to play their part in ending the nation's childhood obesity epidemic.

[www.ActionforHealthyKids.org](http://www.ActionforHealthyKids.org)

The websites listed in this document are provided as a service only to identify potentially useful ideas and resources for creating healthier school cultures. Action for Healthy Kids is not responsible for maintaining these external websites, nor does the listing of these sites constitute or imply endorsement of their content.

<sup>1</sup>National Association for Sport and Physical Education. Integrating Physical Activity into the Complete School Day.

<http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/publications/teachingTools/upload/PA-During-School-Day.pdf>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.yoga4classrooms.com/benefits-of-yoga-in-schools>

<sup>3</sup>[http://dailybruin.com/2011/01/03/ucla\\_health\\_services\\_professor\\_antronette\\_yancey\\_created\\_instant\\_recess\\_program\\_for\\_10minute\\_exercis/](http://dailybruin.com/2011/01/03/ucla_health_services_professor_antronette_yancey_created_instant_recess_program_for_10minute_exercis/)

<sup>4</sup>"Physical Activity in Schools, Resources and Case Studies to Implement HB11-1069." LiveWell Colorado Webinar – August 16, 2011

<sup>5</sup>J.B. Madigan. "Action-Based Learning: Building Better Brains through Movement." <http://abl-lab.com/wp-content/themes/abl/doc/abl-handout.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>Alliance for a Healthier Generation. [https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/asset/48dfmv/11-2659\\_SWToolkitHigh.pdf](https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/asset/48dfmv/11-2659_SWToolkitHigh.pdf)

<sup>7</sup>Adapted from Alliance for a Healthier Generation,

[https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/asset/48dfmv/11-2659\\_SWToolkitHigh.pdf](https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/asset/48dfmv/11-2659_SWToolkitHigh.pdf)

& Colorado Legacy Foundation, "Move More, Learn More:

Physical Activity at the Secondary Level," Webinar, September, 2012

<sup>8</sup>Alliance for a Healthier Generation.

[https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/asset/48dfmv/11-2659\\_SWToolkitHigh.pdf](https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/asset/48dfmv/11-2659_SWToolkitHigh.pdf)

