

# GET THE FACTS:

## Movement Breaks in the Classroom (Grades K-5)

Not all students have access to safe streets, playgrounds, or spaces to be physically active. Movement breaks in the classroom provide students with the opportunity to be physically active and help them meet the national physical activity standards<sup>1</sup> of at least 60 minutes per day.

- ▶ Movement breaks are short physical activity opportunities done in the classroom.
- ▶ Only one in four children<sup>2</sup> meets the national recommendations<sup>1</sup> of physical activity. Movement breaks can supplement other school physical activity opportunities, like recess and physical education, to help more children meet physical activity guidelines.<sup>3,4</sup>
- ▶ Students enjoy having opportunities to be physically active in the classroom, and movement breaks allow students to refocus and bring full attention back to academic work.<sup>5-7</sup>

**Movement breaks can help teachers create a positive classroom climate and culture.<sup>8</sup>**

- ▶ Movement breaks in the classroom can increase students' time spent on tasks<sup>3,4</sup> and engagement in learning.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Movement breaks can help with classroom management when implemented appropriately.<sup>4,5</sup>
- ▶ Students say they can focus and learn better and are more excited about school after movement breaks.<sup>6,7</sup>
- ▶ Teachers enjoy leading movement breaks. When teachers participate in the breaks, they can also experience the health benefits of being physically active.<sup>4</sup>

**Childhood is a crucial period for developing movement skills and healthy habits. Providing students with physical activity will help them build a foundation for overall health and well-being.**

- ▶ Regular physical activity can reduce anxiety, stress, and symptoms of depression and improve self-esteem.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Active students generally have better heart and lung health, stronger muscles and bones, and healthier body weight than inactive students.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Students who are physically active tend to have better grades, attendance at school, memory, and attention.<sup>9</sup>





Experts agree that students should have opportunities for classroom physical activity. Teachers can help students meet the physical activity recommendations by incorporating movement breaks in the classroom.<sup>10-12</sup>

- ▶ Providing resources and proper training in effective ways to promote movement in the classroom can increase teacher uptake and confidence in implementation and provide children with opportunities for physical activity.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Some tips to help teachers run movement breaks are:
  - ✓ Introduce and demonstrate activity breaks using a video or other examples.<sup>7</sup> Tailor the breaks to the context of your classroom.<sup>4</sup>
  - ✓ Be consistent with the days and times you do movement breaks.<sup>7</sup>
  - ✓ Outline expectations for students and make sure children are aware of their physical space.<sup>7</sup> Modify activities to allow all students to participate in the breaks.<sup>4</sup> Deep breaths after the movement break can help students transition to the next activity.<sup>5</sup>
  - ✓ Participate in the movement break activities with the students when possible.<sup>4</sup>
  - ✓ Explain the benefits of moving during the school day and provide students with positive reinforcement, especially those who may find movement breaks more challenging.<sup>7</sup>
  - ✓ Consider students' preferences when doing breaks.<sup>3</sup> Students like movement breaks that allow choice, imagination, and that are at an appropriate level of difficulty. They do not like breaks that are too difficult or silly.<sup>6</sup>

## WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

See the list of references for this fact sheet: [www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc/priority-areas/physical-activity/movement-breaks-fact-sheet](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc/priority-areas/physical-activity/movement-breaks-fact-sheet)

The following additional resources may be useful:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Available at: [https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical\\_Activity\\_Guidelines\\_2nd\\_edition.pdf](https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Classroom Physical Activity. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/classroom-pa.htm>
- Carter J, Greene J, Neeraja S, Bovenzi, M, Sabir M, Carter S, Bolton AA, Barrett JL, Reiner JR, Cradock AL. *Boston, MA: Movement Breaks in the Classroom* [Issue Brief]. Boston Public Schools, Boston Public Health Commission, and the CHOICES Learning Collaborative Partnership at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, MA; August 2022. Available at: <https://choicesproject.org/publications/brief-movement-breaks>
- CHOICES Strategy Profile: Movement Breaks in the Classroom. CHOICES Project Team at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, MA; October 2022. Available at: <https://choicesproject.org/publications/movement-breaks-profile>
- The Community Preventive Services Task Force. Physical Activity: Classroom-based Physical Activity Break Interventions. The Community Guide. 2021:8. Available at: <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/findings/physical-activity-classroom-based-physical-activity-break-interventions>

## SUGGESTED CITATION

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