



## What is the impact of physical education on students' well-being and academic success?

Research confirms that healthier students make better learners. The term *quality physical education* is used to describe programs that are catered to a student's age, skill level, culture and unique needs. They include 90 minutes of physical activity per week, fostering students' well-being and improving their academic success. However, instructional time for quality phys-ed programs around the world are being decreased to prioritize other subject areas (especially math, science, social studies and English) in hopes to achieve higher academic achievement. However, several studies have identified a significant relationship between physical activity and academic achievement. Research also demonstrates that phys-ed does not have negative impacts on student success and that it offers the following physical, social, emotional and cognitive benefits:

**Physical.** Quality phys-ed helps students understand how exercise helps them to develop a healthy lifestyle, gain a variety of skills that help them to participate in a variety of physical activities and enjoy an active lifestyle.

**Social.** Quality phys-ed provides students with the opportunity to socialize with others and learn different skills such as communication, tolerance, trust, empathy and respect for others. They also learn positive team skills including cooperation, leadership, cohesion and responsibility. Students who play sports or participate in other physical activities experience a variety of emotions and learn how to better cope in stressful, challenging or painful situations.

**Emotional.** Quality phys-ed can be associated with improved mental health, since increased activity provides psychological benefits including reduced stress, anxiety and depression. It also helps students develop strategies to manage their emotions and increases their self-esteem.

**Cognitive.** Research tends to show that increased blood flow produced by physical activity may stimulate the brain and boost mental performance. Avoiding inactivity may also increase energy and concentration in the classroom.

Therefore, decreasing time for quality phys-ed to allow more instructional time for core curricular subjects – including math, science, social studies and English – is counterproductive, given its positive benefits on health outcomes and school achievement.

For online resources as well as the research references that inform this issue, please visit:  
[www.edcan.ca/facts-on-education](http://www.edcan.ca/facts-on-education)

