

Fit kids finish first in the classroom

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Fit kids aren't only first picked for kickball. New research from Michigan State University shows middle school students in the best physical shape outscore their classmates on standardized tests and take home better report cards.

Published in the *Journal of [Sports Medicine](#) and [Physical Fitness](#)*, it's the first study linking children's fitness to both improved scores on objective tests and better grades, which rely on subjective decisions by teachers.

The study also is among the first to examine how academic performance relates to all aspects of physical fitness – including body fat, [muscular strength](#), flexibility and endurance – according to lead researcher Dawn Coe.

"We looked at the full range of what's called health-related fitness," said Coe, who conducted the research as a doctoral student in MSU's kinesiology department and is now an assistant professor at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. "[Kids](#) aren't really fit if they're doing well in just one of those categories."

Coe and colleagues gathered their data from 312 students in sixth through eighth grade at a West Michigan [school](#). They gauged the kids' fitness with an established program of push-ups, shuttle runs and other exercises.

Then they compared those scores to students' letter grades throughout the school year in four core classes and their performance on a

standardized test.

The results showed the fittest children got the highest test scores and the best grades, regardless of gender or whether they'd yet gone through puberty.

The findings suggest schools that cut physical education and recess to focus on core subjects may undermine students' success on the standardized tests that affect school funding and prestige, said co-author James Pivarnik, who advised Coe on the project.

"Look, your fitter kids are the ones who will do better on tests, so that would argue against cutting physical activity from the school day," said Pivarnik, an MSU professor of kinesiology. "That's the exciting thing, is if we can get people to listen and have some impact on public policy."

Making fitness a bigger part of children's lives also sets them up for future success, Pivarnik added.

"Fit kids are more likely to be fit adults," he said. "And now we see that fitness is tied to academic achievement. So hopefully the fitness and the success will both continue together."

Provided by Michigan State University

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