

Physical education should be 'core academic subject'

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Daily exercise for school children is so important that physical education should be made a "core academic subject," says a new report from the Institute of Medicine.

University of Arizona professor Scott Going, a co-author of the report, says that [physical health](#) is so important to the overall health,

development and [academic success](#) for children that schools should play a primary role in ensuring an adequate level of activity.

"We need to make physical education a core subject, just like math and English and science," says Going, professor of nutritional sciences and interim head of the department of [nutritional sciences](#). "We felt so strongly that it's important for kids to get it for their physical health, for their mental health, that they should get it at school so that all kids have a chance of meeting the recommendation."

The report calls on the U.S. Department of Education to craft a consistent nationwide policy to help reverse the trend since 2001's No Child Left Behind Act that has had schools cutting time from recess and physical education to focus on [standardized tests](#).

"The intention of the study is to analyze the evidence and make a very clear recommendation that hopefully influences policy," Going says. "Our great hope is that we would create this habit in kids, and they'd want to sustain it and receive all the [health benefits](#) that physical activity has to offer."

The report, which its authors hope will influence [education policy](#) at the local as well as national level, says students should have opportunities to engage in at least 60 minutes per day of vigorous or moderate-intensity physical. Taking a broad view of the school day, the report's authors include before- and after-school programs like active transportation, sports and clubs as a way to boost activity.

"It's looking at all the possible ways that during a school day you might receive the recommended minutes of activity," Going says.

The Committee on Physical Activity and Physical Education in the School Environment, which put together the report, anticipates some

feedback, Going says, with schools struggling to find the resources, both time and money, to improve the physical activity. But the payoff is clear.

"We're not just making these recommendations naively. This is not going to be easy to achieve, but we took the recommendation that far because it's that good for kids and the data makes it clear that if kids are active, their attention on task is better," Going says. "What you find over and over again is the schools that make the change and take this on become higher performers in other areas."

Making the change will require a grassroots, community-by-community effort as the public buys into the committee's data-supported recommendation. Efforts from allied groups, like the American College of Sports Medicine and American Academy of Pediatrics, will also help, Going says.

"The big challenge of this recommendation is how to find the resources to sustain these programs. But if something is important you have to go after it and get it done," he says. "We're moving in the right direction in terms of getting multiple groups to work together and speak up and more and more parents and educators are understand the benefits. Overall, physical activity levels and resources are low, but I do think we're turning the corner."

The study, "Educating the Student Body: Taking [Physical Activity](#) and [Physical Education](#) to School," was sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and is available through the National Academies Press online.

More information: www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=18314

Provided by University of Arizona

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